UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE FOR EIGHT STUDENT WRITERS

BY

SCOTT RYAN FILKINS

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2017

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Mark Dressman, Chair
Professor Sarah McCarthey
Professor Cris Mayo, University of West Virginia
Professor Catherine Prendergast

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this three-semester qualitative study was to better understand, from a student's perspective, what it means to transition from high school to college as a writer. Drawing on student interviews, school-based and out-of-school writing, process logs, think-aloud protocols, and interviews with students' family members and teachers, the study also sought to understand how and why students' composing processes changed in the transition to college, the instructional contexts they found most and least helpful, and the contribution the transition made to students' larger life narratives.

Taking a sociocultural view toward writing development, but also acknowledging the evidence of development residing within changes of written products and processes, the study found, first of all, that most of the participants were successful in their transition to college writing, despite the popular narrative that US high school students are underprepared (Arum & Roska, 2011; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2011). Their transition narratives varied significantly, however, because of a number of factors, including the different writing experiences they had in high school, their varying attitudes and beliefs about writing, the different college contexts they encountered, and the wide range of writing experiences in which they engaged there.

More specifically, students in the study reported varying (and sometimes contradictory) beliefs about the importance of becoming more independent in their transition to college. They widely agreed that the reading demands of college were new and overwhelming, and their responses to these demands were deeply interconnected with their writing processes; most commonly, students used writing tasks to decide what actually needed to be read. Another key source of development for some students was

engaging for the first time with the new expectations of writing in disciplines other than English, despite having written in other content areas in high school.

The last pair of findings relates to students' need to understand and negotiate new audiences for their writing in college. Students perceived a new degree of distance between themselves and their teacher-readers as they transitioned to college, and they reflected on how that distance affected (mostly negatively) their writing processes. Students also found themselves newly responsible to advocate for themselves about and through their writing. Equipped by school writing instruction that framed argument as presentation of evidence, they drew on other communicative experiences to craft writing that asserted their authority while also attempting to preserve the authority of the audience.

Taken as a whole, the findings for this study suggest, first, the need for high school teachers to consider the social facets of writing as legitimate and necessary areas of study and instruction for college preparation. Second, high school and college teachers can potentially better serve students by recognizing the ways in which their personal relationships serve as a resource for student writers. Last, high school and college teachers, as well as students, families, policymakers, researchers need to increase awareness and understanding of the ways in which sociocultural factors such as racial and cultural identity inform all aspects of the transition, particularly when students are moving from a high school that is, in fact, more diverse than the college or university context to which the transition occurs.

Keywords: college-level writing, high school writing, college readiness, transition

dedicated fondly to Emily Stipes Watts and Gail E. Hawisher,
writing teachers, mentors, and friends who set me down paths of learning and living that
I never could have imagined for myself

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank, foremost, the students who agreed to participate in this study, for opening up their lives and writing from their first year of college with so much honesty and insight. Additionally, I thank their family members and teachers for taking the time to talk with me about the students' home and school worlds.

Deep gratitude goes to my committee: Dr. Cris Mayo, for staying on board despite a move, and for being the last great teacher I encountered at Illinois; Dr. Catherine Prendergast, for teaching me so much in my first writing course as an undergraduate and then in my first course in Writing Studies as a graduate student (and all the time in between and since); Dr. Sarah McCarthey, for the patience and good humor she needed to put up with me through our work with the National Writing Project and the advice she provided throughout the preliminary exam and dissertation process; and to Dr. Mark Dressman, who agreed to meet on a frigid day in January 2014 to (finally) come up with a dissertation project with/for me. Getting to know these students and writing about them through this dissertation has been the most satisfying professional work I've ever engaged in, and I am thankful for Mark's support, guidance, and encouragement all along the way.

I'm grateful, too, for the other faculty at Illinois who have been instrumental in shaping my thinking and writing, most notably David Zola, Paul Prior, Sue Noffke, Libbie Morley, and Anne Haas Dyson. They always treated this high school teacher who just would not leave the classroom with respect, and the feeling was mutual.

Thanks to my English department colleagues for allowing me to share early and developing versions of the findings of this project, with special thanks to my lunch crew,

Liz and Stephen, who heard more than they wanted but always responded with enthusiasm to texts I sent as I made new discoveries about the participants in the study.

And, last, huge thanks to my friends and support system Lisa Storm Fink, Jennifer Buehler, Cathy Fleischer, Karla Zaccor, Phil Wilder, Haeny Yoon, Cathy Gorman, Jenn Raskauskus, Sarah Durst, Dave Hohman, Renée Dinnerstein, Patrick Berry, Anna Smith, and the Wendys: Maa and Maxson.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At a 2009 news conference at a Brooklyn charter school early in his tenure as Secretary of the United States Department of Education, Arne Duncan told the press that he wished to be able to look any second grade student in the eye and tell him or her, "'You're on track, you're going to be able to go to a good college, or you're not'" (as qtd. by Hernández, 2009). Duncan's desire to know with certainty whether an eight-year-old child is on the path to a "good college" might be viewed as a well-intentioned desire to ensure that all American schoolchildren are prepared for future academic endeavors, regardless of their address or parents' income or level of education. But Duncan's comment also raises a number of questions. Can we know what college will be like ten years into the future? What would one need to know about that child to know if he or she is "on the right track" for such a future? And perhaps more importantly, what might we be missing in our understanding of that child *in the present* if we view him or her as a potential college student at eight years old?

Though Duncan's statement can be dismissed as an exaggeration made by someone without much experience in education, the goals and beliefs that underlie it are signs of the very real policy context in which this project is situated—namely, in an era in which the rhetoric of and activity around *college readiness* are prominent and powerful. Discussion of college readiness saturates contemporary K-12 educational discourse, most evident in language such as "Preparing America's Students for College and Career," the subtitle of the Common Core State Standards (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010) which had been adopted in 41 states at the time of this study, following on the heels of the ACT's *College and Career Readiness Standards* (ACT, 2010). K-12 public education, historically a site

of contested goals and varied potential outcomes (Labaree, 2009), seems at the moment particularly focused on the single facet of preparation for post-secondary education and labor (see Karp [2013], Larson [2013], and Ravitch [2013] for discussions that take the contemporary neoliberal agenda into account).

Duncheon (2015) describes recent and ongoing efforts of the college readiness agenda, including curricular alignment between high schools and colleges and the development of lists of skills and attendant assessments to measure them, but she contends that the notion of what college readiness is remains "elusive" (p. 5). She offers as a commonly agreed upon (if vague) definition of college readiness as "the preparation required to enroll in college and persist to graduation without need for remediation" (Duncheon, 2015, p. 25). She also summarizes college-readiness research by offering three broad categories, including *cognitive academic factors* (content knowledge and cognitive skills), *non-cognitive academic factors* (mindsets and behaviors), and *campus integration factors* ("college knowledge" and relationships to self and others) (pp. 8-10).

The research behind these categories has been, of course, the object of some critique, particularly in relation to the degree to which non-majority perspectives are represented in what it means to be ready for and to transition to college. Carter, Locks, and Winkle-Wagner (2013), for example, summarize three categories of barriers especially salient for students of color: finances, academic preparation, and a negative climate for students of color at predominantly white schools. While the concept of "academic preparation" maps onto Duncheon's (2015) model, "campus integration factors" surely take on different meanings for white and non-white students, and finances are not even part of the conversation in the mainstream discussion of college readiness.

Similarly, Welton and Martinez (2013) caution against taking a "one size fits all approach" to defining college readiness and cite the need to consider the "contextual needs" and "cultural identities" of students in ways that broad, uncritical approaches may not (p. 200).

High schools have typically been held formally accountable for only the first readiness indicator in the list—content knowledge and cognitive skills—and at that, through the 1990s and 2000s, only the narrow slice of students' proficiency in reading and mathematics was of concern. With the arrival of the CCSS and assessments that rely heavily on writing as both an object and means of assessment, students' performance not only as readers but also as writers is, for better or for worse, factoring prominently into the debate over what makes a student "ready for college" (Applebee, 2013).

Concern over students' preparation for success in college writing is not, however, new, nor is evidence of it located solely in documents tied to systems of private (ACT) or state/federal assessment (associated with the CCSS). Almeida (2015) points to early concerns over college readiness in writing in Harvard's 1874 implementation of its freshman English course to respond to perceptions of weakness in their incoming students' writing. He also explains that in 1898, the University of California at Berkeley was the first institution to offer a remedial writing class to prepare students for the demands of credit-bearing "college-level" courses in the future (p. 48).

A more contemporary effort to support students and teachers in the work of preparing college-ready writers is the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (2011), a joint project of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project. The document goes

beyond most standards' purely cognitive indicators of readiness and product-based evidence of success by identifying key habits of mind (e.g., curiosity, openness, engagement) and listing experiences with reading, writing, and critical analysis that develop certain skills and capacities (e.g., rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking). In response to the attempt to synthesize what preparation for writing in college means, Severino (2012) and Summerfield and Anderson (2012) wonder about the Framework's lack of social habits such as empathy, and how to connect the identified habits with the suggested experiences. Hansen (2012) is concerned that, even with the breadth of habits of mind and experiences, trying to create any sort of general model for instruction or competency is inherently limiting. McComiskey (2012), though, contends that when viewed as "additional support for the CCSS or as a guide to developing assessment instruments based on the CCSS, then it should have some impact on secondary education and the preparation of high school students for the rigors of college writing" (p. 538).

The National Writing Project is also in the midst of a federally funded grant program entitled The College-Ready Writers Program (CRWP) that focuses specifically on the production of certain kinds of text. According to the program's website, the CRWP takes as its central goal "to help students become skilled at writing arguments from nonfiction sources" and provides sample text sets, prompts, teaching activities, and professional development offerings. Gallagher, Woodworth, and Arshan (2015) found that through implementation across 22 districts in 10 states, the CRWP had a "positive, statistically significant effect on the four attributes of student argument writing: content, structure, stance, and conventions" and that "students demonstrated greater proficiency in the quality of reasoning and use of evidence in their writing," but there has not yet been a

study of the program's actual effectiveness at preparing students for writing in college (p. 1).

All this is to say that the transition from high school to college for student writers, the topic of this project, is an issue much on the minds of policymakers, educators, and key professional organizations in our field. Alsup and Bernard-Donals (2002) describe misguided attempts to seek out a "seamless high school to college writing curriculum" that fail to take into account the differences in contexts and students in those contexts, and instead call for conversations around the notion of *compatibility*—of curriculum and delivery of curriculum (p. 117). Carroll (2002) offers a similarly realistic view of what might be possible in terms of preparing students for college writing, noting the impossibility of creating a single college preparatory writing curriculum, and acknowledging that students in fact develop *because* of the struggles they encounter with new contexts and expectations. We might be able agree though that the struggle, whatever form it takes in students' particular situations, should be productive and manageable, whether by students on their own (supported by resources they bring with them and have their genesis in previous social interactions), or with the explicit support of knowledgeable or caring others who can provide advice, feedback, or guidance along the way.

Indeed, most colleges and universities acknowledge institutionally the key role writing plays in the high school to college transition through their official curriculum, in the form of first-year composition requirements. Although this project is not limited to students' experiences in first-year composition courses, it is informed by an understanding of the significant contributions first-year composition makes in shaping a

students' transition to college. Durst (1999) argues for the goals of first-year composition by explaining that

> The course can and does attempt to provide a kind of intellectual orientation to university academics and a set of strategies, or dispositions of mind, that will help prepare students for not just the writing, but also the kinds of intensive, rigorous thinking, reading, speaking, and problem solving that make up a university education. (p. 73)

An NCTE brief (2013), furthermore, synthesizes research that points to the role first-year composition can play in fostering engagement and retention, in enhancing rhetorical knowledge, and in developing metacognition.

Yet, scholars such as Downs and Wardle (2007) acknowledge that writing is "neither basic nor universal but content- and context-contingent and irreducibly complex," making it difficult for a single course or series of courses to provide students what they need to navigate all those complexities (p. 558). Knodt (2006) suggests that the diversity of approaches first-year composition courses take in introducing students to college writing—from programs rooted in classical rhetoric to those with clear contemporary sociopolitical motivations—makes it difficult to discuss first-year composition as an entity itself, due in part to the contested nature of what it means to write successfully in college.

I come to this project (ironically, perhaps) with no direct experience with first-year composition, but with multiple facets of interest nonetheless. As a first-generation college student who was certified as "highly successful" in my K-12 education, I came to the university feeling nonetheless underprepared as a writer. I earned a 4 out of 10 on the

timed essay designed to facilitate placement in a first-year composition track (I'm sure I had as little insight on Orwell's comparison of sports to war then as I do now), but my score on the English subtest of the ACT placed me out of an introductory university writing course. Even at the time, I found that means of placement odd and a bit unnerving, but even more unnerving was the *C* I received on my first college essay, a very clunky explication of T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland." This grade was by far the lowest grade I had ever received on any writing (or any*thing*). My confidence shaken and questions about my suitability for college swirling, I met with that professor several times that semester after the sting of the grade wore off. Partly because of the profound impact this teacher had on me, and partly because the teaching of writing became such a significant part of my life (I had been a mathematics major at the time), the experience of writing that first college essay and my response to it is one of my most vivid memories as an undergraduate. It was the first time I had to muster up any sort of academic resilience, and I have always been grateful for that professor's care and support through the process.

As a high school English teacher charged, in part, with preparing students for writing in college, I often wondered if I was doing enough, if my assumptions about what writing in college were accurate (after all, I was basing my theory of college writing on my own very limited experiences), and if there were other things I should be doing to increase students' likelihood of success as writers in postsecondary education. As an educator who began his career only slightly before the major federal accountability movement associated with *No Child Left Behind* (2001), my professional life has been permeated with concerns about certifying readiness. Being in the classroom during the implementation of the Common Core Standards, an example of what Tierney (2015)

considers the type of coordinated activity that has the potential to have positive effects on students' readiness for college, has fueled my curiosity about the standards themselves and the notions of readiness they espouse[1].

Over the course of this project, I began teaching dual credit English, which meant I was teaching a writing class for which students received both high school English and college first-year composition credit. This teaching assignment only heightened my interest in knowing exactly what I was preparing students for, and what that preparation should look like. As I embarked on this project, I found myself becoming aware of broad generalizations that I would make, or that I would hear colleagues make, to students about "what it's going to be like in college." Based on personal experiences often from ten or more years ago, and almost always used to induce some sense of fear in or compliance from students, these statements seemed unhelpful at best, and often harmful for the potentially inaccurate picture of students' possible futures they created.

Last, as a graduate student engaged in coursework in Writing Studies, I am aware of the preponderance of scholarship focused on college-level writers from the perspective of college faculty. While I certainly find immense value in that work, I also found myself interested in the possibility of a project that could contribute to the knowledge about early college writers from the perspective of someone who knows high school contexts well, and knew the particular students who will be framed in the research as "writers in college" *before* they were in college.

The approach for this project, then, is to study broadly students' transition from high school to college, considering their experiences in high school—and even earlier as

[1] The Common Core Standards for Writing will be a focus of discussion in the review of literature provided in Chapter 2.

possible—and the writing events they found in all of their classes and school lives in the first year of college. This project is informed by calls such as Harklau's (2001) for the need for more research that links "college students' perceptions of collegiate literacy practices to previous schooling histories in secondary education" (p. 37) and that "cross[es] institutional boundaries [by] contextualiz[ing] entering college students' beliefs and responses in their high school academic literacy experiences" (p. 39).

Harklau (2001) also calls for particular attention to be paid to students' own views of the transition, framed by their perspectives and not those of the interested institutions. Durst (1999) makes a similar assertion when he notes that "we have not been sufficiently aware of students' attitudes and prior knowledge about writing, nor of how their attitudes and knowledge affect the way they approach composition instruction" (p. 37). This project takes as its primary data source interviews with eight students—Anna, Calvin, Carter, D'Metra, Elijah, Kendra, Valorous, and Zarina (all names are pseudonyms)—introduced first as seniors in their last semester of high school and followed into the summer after their first year of college, seeking to investigate these research questions:

- From a student's point of view, what does it mean to "become" a college writer?
- How do students decide when to adopt, adapt, or abandon a writing practice?
- What instructional contexts or practices do students view as supporting—or impeding—the transition from high school to college as writers?
- How does the transition to college contribute to students' larger life narratives as literate people?

The chapters that follow will review literature related to the high school to college writing transition by examining first what is known about writing instruction in US high schools, then the varied conceptions of the high school to college transition, followed by

a review of several major longitudinal studies of college writers, and last, the relative absence of student voices in conversations around college readiness in writing. I will then describe the methods I used for developing case studies and thematic discussions of student writers that take an attitude of respect for students' complex individual experiences as literate beings rather than the predictive, certain gaze toward students inherent in the statement that began this introduction.

Drawing from interviews with students, selected family members, and influential teachers, as well as think-aloud reading and writing protocols and student writing from three semesters, in Chapter 4, I offer explorations of students' diverse transition experiences and the complex role the concept *independence* played in students' descriptions of them. In Chapter 5, I turn to two sources of academic challenge that students frequently cited—the increased reading load and the demands of writing in unfamiliar disciplines—and their responses to them. In Chapter 6, I examine how the transition to college presented shifts in students' familiar writing situations, documenting how students wrote for an audience that they did not know well and wrote to self-advocate within a new institutional system, before closing in Chapter 7 with a discussion of implications for theory and practice and avenues for research that builds on the findings of this study.

Throughout, I draw on data from both high school and college, not to suggest clear cause-and-effect or before-and-after relationships, but to keep students' past contexts in conversation with their transition experiences. Together, these findings will suggest an understanding of the college writing transition as diverse, highly socially

situated, and much more complex than any list of cognitive skills or descriptions of desired texts could reveal.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This review of the literature focused on the notion of *college readiness* in writing and the transition from high school to college for student writers draws from large-scale quantitative studies, large and small qualitative studies of student and classroom writing practices, longitudinal studies of college writers in development, and essays on the topic of college writing from the perspective of both educators and students. For the purposes of framing the context and assumptions of my study, the literature in this review is organized into four main content sections—the state of writing in high school, the transition from high school to college, the development of college writers, and students' perspectives on the transitions—and a section synthesizing varying views on the concept of *development*, a key theoretical concept that will guide this study.

What Do We Know about Writing in High School?

Despite the general concern over the adequacy of high schools as sites of preparation for future college writers (Arum & Roska, 2011; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2011), we know relatively little about high school English curriculum and subsequent practice in general (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2006), and perhaps even less about contemporary writing practices in high schools more specifically (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). By combining findings from large-scale and classroom-level studies, this section will attempt to synthesize what *is* known about writing in high school (largely centered around what students write and how they are taught to write), a first step toward understanding the transition from high school to college for writers.

Findings from Large-Scale Studies

Scherff and Piazza (2005) surveyed high school students from diverse academic tracks from multiple sites in Florida to learn about the types and frequency of writing they did in their English classes, as well as their perspectives on their participation in writing process-oriented instruction. Students reported writing most frequently in response to literature, typically once every week or every other week. Other types of writing such as narratives, persuasive essays, and summaries occurred less frequently, with research papers reported as typically occurring just once a year. Beyond variety of type, Scherff and Piazza (2005) found that about a third of students reported their teachers had used models of writing to help them write better as part of writing instruction. They found, however, that most students recalled inconsistent experience with process writing approaches, such as brainstorming, revising, and peer review. Overall, they assert, students are not guaranteed ample opportunities to write or access to widely acknowledged effective practices in writing instruction.

Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken's (2009) large-scale study of high school writing turns the research focus away from students' perspectives to teachers' self-reported practice, but their findings are similarly mixed. They found that teachers assigned short-answer responses, worksheets, and summaries most frequently (once a week or more), with considerable variation among disciplines for other types of writing. Overall, teachers seldom assigned writing requiring multiple paragraphs, and much of the writing required little processing on the students' part—in their words, it is "writing without composing" (p. 151). Teachers reported using most frequently research-based teaching techniques such as providing verbal praise, direct instruction/modeling, and establishing specific

goals for a written piece. Few teachers (11%) reported using any sort of writing curriculum to shape their approach to teaching writing, with those responses running the gamut from the writing activities embedded in a commercially prepared literature anthology to stand-alone writing programs such as the Jane Schaffer method (a highly prescriptive program focusing on structure).

This finding aligns with Applebee and Langer's (2013) assertion that writing, "perhaps more than any other school subject, lacks a widely accepted framework for discussing what students should know and be able to do" (p. 8). The findings from their National Study of Writing Instruction suggest a portrait of tempered hope regarding the state of writing instruction in America's high schools, largely because of the historical scope it offers as a follow-up study from earlier iterations of similar work. They note an improved understanding of literacy process development in the field generally (with particular focus on adolescent literacy development), as well as calls for improved writing instruction and increased time for writing from groups such as the National Commission on Writing and documents such as the Common Core State Standards.

Overall, however, Applebee and Langer (2013) offer a view of writing instruction that complements that of Scherff and Piazza (2005) and Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken (2009) when they state that

> The actual writing that goes on in typical classrooms across the United States remains dominated by tasks in which the teacher does all the composing, and students are left only to fill in missing information, whether copying directly from a teacher's presentation, completing worksheets and chapter summaries, replicating highly formulaic essay structures keyed to high-stakes tests, or writing

to "show what they know" the particular information the teacher is seeking.

Writing as a way to study, learn, and go beyond…is rare. (p. 27)

More specifically, they found that high school students are "not writing a great deal"—approximately 1.6 pages of text per week in English class and 2.1 pages per week for all other subjects combined (p. 13). Classroom observations suggest that high school students spend only around 8 percent of class time engaged in extended writing, a figure whose optimism is challenged by Fisher's (2009) observational study in which he found students wrote only 2.8% of the time.

In their analysis of the writing *instruction* students receive, Applebee and Langer (2013) found that teachers most frequently specified the parts of a written assignment to include, and claimed to engage students in activities traditionally associated with a process approach. But they also posit that teachers may be under the impression that their instruction "is process-oriented, even though it isn't" (p. 5). In other words, teachers may be employing a range of isolated activities that, *when presented as part of a coherent writing process approach* would represent the kinds of instruction associated with improved student achievement, but when experienced *on their own* do not. Emig (1971) notes similar concern with teachers' tendency to under-conceptualize and oversimplify the writing process, with *outlining* serving, for example, as a substitution for *planning* and *correcting surface errors* substituting for *revision*. Importantly, though, Vetter, Myers, and Hester (2014) illuminate how challenging it can be for teachers to develop a process-approach ideology if their systemic context has other goals (such as preparing for standardized tests) or is already committed to other approaches (based more on correctness of product than development of process).

Applebee and Langer's (2013) skepticism about the prevalence of process-approach instruction comes, in part, from the mismatch between teacher self-reports of practice and achievement data from sources such as the National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP), to which I will now turn. The most recently available NAEP writing data (2011) found that only 27 percent of 12th grade students wrote at or above the *proficient* level, defined as writing that is at least "coherent," "well structured," develops "ideas in a logical, clear, and effective manner," and uses "relevant details and examples [that] contribute to overall communicative effectiveness" (p. 39).

Even within that 27% of students who wrote at the proficient level by the end of high school, though, there was considerable variation by race, gender, and socioeconomic class. On average, white, Asian, and multiracial students outperformed African-American and Latino/a students; female students outperformed males; students who came from households with higher educational attainment outperformed those who came from households with lower educational attainment; and students from schools in suburban settings outperformed students from schools in cities or rural settings. NAEP also found that students who wrote 4-5 pages per week for homework in their English class outperformed those who wrote less. Note that this figure is approximately double what Applebee and Langer (2013) found was typical in a high school English class.

Findings from Classroom-Based Studies

While data from large scale surveys and assessments is crucial for understanding the broad view of what is happening with high school writers, studies from within classrooms offer additional understanding of how process pedagogy is enacted in actual

classrooms. Here I will discuss three studies that examine specifically the use of model essays, brainstorming through talk, and peer response.

Samuelson (2009) explored how teachers and students discussed sample papers in an Advanced Placement English class, where one might expect the most (if not the best) writing instruction to occur in a high school setting. The samples in question are those produced in response to prompts from past AP exams for the purpose of preparing for the exam. Samuelson found that a significant force behind the discussion of the models was *ventriloquation* of the voice of a potential rater of the exam, mediated by rubrics produced and released by the College Board. This finding points to the complicated relationship between process pedagogy and the pressures of standardized assessment, but is also tempered by other more generative examples of ventriloquation in which students use the voices of others to "try out new ways of talking about writing and the speak back to authority" (Samuelson, 2009, p. 77).

In her study of a tenth grade writing class, Sperling (1995) found that within a single instructional period in which students were talking about a controversial topic in preparation for writing, they assumed a number of school roles, friendship roles, and performative stances, all tied to the particular ways they were situating themselves socially in the moment. More broadly, their talk (and writing) took on pragmatic roles such as the *historian*, the *prognosticator*, and the *philosopher*. Her study was small, so she cautions against specific implications to be drawn from it, but she urges teachers to be ready for the complexity of roles to avail themselves, and to view that complexity not as a problem to be concerned about, but rather as a resource to exploit for developing students' capacities as speakers and writers.

Similarly, Freedman's (1992) study of peer response groups in two different English classrooms suggests that the talk students engaged in was highly linked to social roles students took on or resisted. If students were provided a sheet to guide their response process, they would often take on the role of "good student" and work together to get the assignment done, at the expense of any substantial talk about the paper under consideration. Students also resisted the role of critic to one another, with the ethics implicit in a peer relationship complicating the desire to be a good student in the response process.

While these small, unrelated studies may do little to represent broad trends in high school writing instruction, they together offer a glimpse into the complexity of practice that is by necessity flattened in large surveys or national assessments. They remind us that even when we might say with some certainty that a particular practice is occurring in a large number of US high school classrooms (which is itself not often the case), how that practice is being enacted by teachers and students will vary significantly across districts, classrooms, and individuals in those classrooms.

Conceptions of "College Readiness" for Writers

The very notion of *college-level writing*, with is implication of a belief in stage-based theory of development that can be separated into clear, hierarchical categories seems at odds with a sociocultural view of literacy that sees writing as highly dependent on context, not definable by the features of the written text itself, and embedded in valued practices that enable increased participation within a community (Heath, 1983; Hull & Moje, 2012; Prior, 2006). The editors of NCTE's two volumes of essays around the college-level writing question (Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006; Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau,

2010) seem aware of this tension by placing *college-level* in quotation marks, suggesting through punctuation the slippery nature of the term, but still using the term.

Sullivan's (2006) cornerstone essay of the first collection, in fact, seems fairly rooted in a more *autonomous* view of literacy, treating writing as activity that is acontextual, skill-based, predictably sequenced, and politically neutral (deCastell and Luke, 1986; Street, 1984). Sullivan (2006) argues for the need to establish "a clear understanding of what we mean by college-level writing" (p. 5) and then frames the benefits of such an understanding in terms of the needs of the institution: placement policies, classroom pedagogy, and program-level decisions. Acknowledging that many students who are admitted to college seem unready for the writing that will be required of them, he refers to *basic writing courses* and stresses the need to "be able to define with some degree of precision when a particular student has passed from the basic writing stage to college-level" (p. 6). This threshold-level mentality seems to imply both that there is a context-free notion of what college-level writing is (and once a student has gotten there, he or she is "set") and that this threshold is knowable, almost certainly in terms of the features of the finished product, the written text that gets the student through the gate from "basic" to *real* college-level work.

Sullivan (2006) goes on to discuss his view of how one might define college-level writing with a bit more consonance with a sociocultural view. He suggests college-level writing is inseparable from notions of reading and thinking; is indicated by the ability to evaluate abstract ideas; has relatively predictable features related to ideas, organization, and editing; and is best viewed as an introduction to "an ongoing conversation that is multilayered and complex" (pp. 16-17). I place the notion of conversation last not

because he does, nor because he gives it the most attention (he does not), but rather to draw attention to writing in terms of its social purpose for students, not just in the qualities of the text itself. Certainly these notions are highly inter-related: writing that gives students entry into particular ongoing conversations is likely to look and sound certain ways, but the converse is not always true. Students are often "trained" to mimic textual features without any sense of what purposes those features serve in the social-communicative aspects of writing. Others, such as Appleman and Green (1993) bring to light the tension college educators feel in valuing both complex notions of process and certain surface textual features, especially in matters related to course placement, where student texts themselves—not an examination the processes that created them—are the basis of judgment.

Unlike Sullivan (2006) who works from text features to inklings of participation, Blau (2010), in his essay "Academic Writing as Participation: Writing Your Way In," takes a more fully realized developmental approach, including discussion of the complications associated with viewing writing as student participation in ongoing academic conversations. Blau takes as the premise of his essay that "students will best learn to produce academic discourse the way they learn to produce any other specialized discourse: through their cultural experiences as members of a discourse community… [allowing them to become eventual] active participants in the community" (p. 31). He then goes on to describe the way in which his first-year English literature course at Columbia facilitates such scaffolded participation. Offering this model is certainly important, a point Blau underscores by suggesting that students are often required to write as if they are members of a certain discourse community before they have even read

a text from the conversations, leading to "formula and outlines and formal requirements designed to ensure that student papers will at least appear to observe the formal conventions of published work" from a particular field (p. 29).

Possibly even more important, though, is Blau's point concerning student agency around writing in first-year or introductory level courses. Acknowledging the identity of students as more than just producers of text, he argues that many students do not aspire to participation in the intellectual communities of their first-year course disciplines—or perhaps any traditional academic community at all, an observation echoed by Durst (1999). As Dyson (1995) notes, "learning to write is not only interactional work, but is ideological work as well; that is, it involves writing oneself into, or in some way against, taken for granted assumptions, including assumptions about relations of teacher and student…of people of different races, genders, and classes" (p. 17). With this in mind, technical descriptions of practice such as Blau's are useful, but any discussions of writing development from a sociocultural perspective need to be sensitive to the ways in which interactions in which writing is embedded are raced, gendered, and classed—and they need to include the perspective to the student on the "receiving end" of the pedagogy in order to do so (e.g., Everhart, 1983; Finders, 1997; Kirkland, 2011; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

In the subsections that follow, I will review existing literature on the transition from high school to college writing, organized around three main views of the transition: *textual/strategic*, *contextual*, and *attitudinal*. Certainly these three categories are not completely distinct, but they offer a sense of the varied ways the field discusses the distinction between writing in college and high school.

The Transition as Textual/Strategic

If the kinds of writing students do in high school may not necessarily align with the expectations of college (Beil & Knight, 2007), students' flexibility in producing new textual forms (or, better put, students' *adaptable use* of knowledge of various written forms and structures) offers one way of viewing the transition from high school to college. Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) studied how students draw from and adapt the resources from high school writing experiences in new writing contexts. They found that students tended either to be *boundary crossers*, who were able to break down genre knowledge and apply it in new ways in new situations, or *boundary guarders*, who relied on and applied entire known genre structures, regardless of the specific nature of a new task. The ability to notice what a writing task *is not* calling for in relation to extant genre knowledge and writing skill helps define the difference, with the *boundary crossers* being more sensitive to mismatches between resources they already have and the requirements of a particular writing task.

Similarly, Artemeva and Fox (2010) found that students entering an unfamiliar writing situation may be able to identify features required of written genre, but will likely be able to produce text resembling the required task *only* if they have participated in writing in that genre before (though even that is not necessarily a sufficient condition for success). Specifically, students were able to identify a technical report in a pre-assessment in an engineering communication course, but unless they had written such reports in other contexts, they were likely to produce a straightforward academic essay when prompted to write a technical report themselves.

Together, these two studies reinforce the notion of college transition that students will bring "their habitual ways of writing to the [college] classroom only to discover that these ways [are] inappropriate" and will need to find ways to respond (Artemeva & Fox, 2010, p. 499). Hassel and Giordano (2009) similarly frame students' desire to "cling" to familiar habits or the likelihood for students to "revert" to high school writing patterns, stressing the tension that students feel when they are unable to match the task at hand with the resources they have most readily available. Indeed, a common thread within the literature seems to suggest that a significant part of the transition is "un-doing" what has been learned in high school (see also Blau [2006], cited below), or, put more positively, transforming textual knowledge that was useful in one context but that is insufficient in another[2].

The Transition as Attitudinal

Lunsford (2006) argues that the transition to college-level writing is marked less by the features of written products and more by the adoption of particular attitudes or orientations toward writing—namely, the willingness to learn from one's own writing. Others view college-readiness as attitudinal, as well, though not always in the same way as Lunsford does. Kearnes (2006), for example, notes that the three most common views toward writing that students bring with them to college are largely *monological*: writing as performance or transaction, writing as contractual agreement, or writing as instrumental tool. It is not until students develop a *dialogical* attitude toward writing, recognizing "that the desire to be understood requires us to find ourselves in relation to

[2] Published academic standards are a major indicator of a textual view toward college readiness and the transition to college. Discussion of the CCSS for Writing (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010) as a document that takes such a view follows in the section on competing theories of writing development at the end of this chapter.

the purposes and needs of the readers, who must serve as a partner in shaping our language" that students are participating in college-level writing (Kearnes, 2006, p. 349). Alsup and Bernard-Donals (2002) take the notion of the dialogic even further when they suggest that the shift for college writers is to view their writing with an "ethical orientation toward others" (p. 121), so that even if the goal of a piece of writing is persuasion or argument in a purely academic sense, those motives are embedded in concern a larger social fabric and awareness of the needs of others.

Durst's (1999) study of incoming first-year composition students offers a related, but substantially different, perspective on attitudinal shifts in becoming a college writer. He frames the necessary shift in attitudes less as a one-sided view of students taking on the already held view of the institution and more as the need for a negotiation between students and teachers. He found that incoming college writers tend to hold a pragmatic, career-oriented views toward college generally, and, by extension, to first-year composition. So, while instructors attempted to instill attitudes of critical awareness and approaches that embraced the recursive nature of processes, students were interested in streamlining their writing process and resisted changes to their ideologies about writing and beyond. Rather than simply calling for a more persuasive or forceful way to change students' viewpoints, however, Durst (1999) calls for instructors to be more aware of their students' attitudes toward writing and look for ways to bridge gaps between institutional and student goals.

The Transition as Contextual

Blau (2006) suggests that attempting to define boundaries between high school and college writing without acknowledging their very different contexts can lead only to

ill-informed generalizations. As Durst (1999) points out, incoming college students often feel anxiety borne out of "their need to learn to negotiate the complex new environment [of college], not just the physical and social settings of the large campus and, for many, new city…but the academic terrain as well" (p. 65). Carter, Locks, and Winkle-Wagner (2013) go a step further and acknowledge that first-year students are also responsible for managing "their finances, course choices, friendships, and relationships with family and faculty in a more complex environment" than they experienced in high school (p. 93).

One way of viewing the difference between high school and college writing, then, is to frame the difference in terms of their different contexts they provide for teaching, learning, and living. Coming close himself to offering an ill-informed generalization he warns about, Blau (2006) explains that one such contextual difference comes from the locally-controlled nature of public schools, designed to "reflect and preserve the parochial values of the community and the parents who send their children to those schools" rather than to challenge those values actively, as one might expect to occur in a college writing class (p. 371). He further suggests that the function of the first year of college (including, presumably, a first-year composition course) is "to debunk much of what [students] learned in high school…and to initiate them into an academic and intellectual community…whose most distinctive features are those that render it wholly unlike the culture of the high school" (p. 370).

Addison and McGee (2010) offer a more practical view of the contextual differences between high school and college by focusing not on the cultural contexts, but rather on the nature of actual writing support services provided to students. They found, for example, that a college faculty member is three times as likely as a high school

writing teacher (58% compared to 18%) to refer a student to institutional support services such as a writing center, a difference largely explainable by the fact that most US high schools do not offer such supports in the first place. Guzy (2011) also points out that in college students are typically "in the company of more culturally diverse peers, of greater intellectual caliber," both of which offer the potential to prompt growth not necessarily possible in a high school setting (p. 69).

Last, a key contextual consideration from the literature is the degree to which high school writing is shaped and bounded by externally imposed standardized tests. Fanetti, Bushrow, and DeWeese (2010), for example, found that high school teachers *wished* to teach a more dynamic, fluid process approach to prepare students for their perception of the demands of college writing, but felt they were constrained from doing so by pressure exerted by standardized tests. As a result, they argue, students are taught to see writing in fairly constrained, formalistic ways[3].

How Do Students "Become" College Writers?

Though they vary in scope and specific approach, five longitudinal studies (Carroll, 2002; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Sommers & Saltz, 2004; Sternglass, 1997; Walvood & McCarthy, 1990) explore student development across the years of undergraduate education, illustrate how the three aforementioned facets of transition—as textual/strategic, as attitudinal, as contextual—work together simultaneously, and offer four broad themes that illuminate how students become college-level writers.

First, writing development and, indeed, students' performance on the varied writing tasks in college need to be viewed not just in terms of the texts they produce, but

[3] See McCarthey (2008) for further evidence of the constraints on writing instruction imposed by external standardized tests.

as representations of more complex literacy practices. Carroll (2002) notes that "the complexity and messiness of this critical literacy, with writing as only one component, makes it difficult to assess a student's writing ability at any given point in the student's career, and even harder to measure a student's 'development' over several years" (p. 4). Although the goal of this study will not be to measure either ability or development, but rather to describe the students' experience in the process of development, Carroll's assertion that writing is much broader than production of text—echoed by the other studies—is well taken[4].

In addition, the four studies validate the approach Blau (2010) represents, noting the importance of finding a legitimate way to participate in academic discourse, to write for more than mere completion of an assignment, and to feel that they are making a worthwhile contribution to the field. All of the studies touch on this concept in some way, with Sternglass (1997) offering the more modest notion of students at least managing to see what their contribution to a given field *might* be. Herrington and Curtis (2000) saw the value of students finding on their campus a "sponsoring group," or discourse community that valued and encouraged their contribution. Of the studies, Sommers and Saltz (2004) are the most adamant on the point, claiming that the most significant distinguisher between students who find success as college writers and those who do not is the willingness to take on the stance of *novice*—as an intellectual who at once has much to learn and who can only learn through the act of attempting themselves the behavior of the more experienced in the field. Carroll (2002), like Blau (2006),

[4] In fact at a session at the 2014 convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau indicated that the follow-up project to their two college-level writing collections will be a volume about the relationship between reading and writing in college.

complicates the notion of taking on a novice stance, pointing out that academic communities are not neutral, and students may have reasons for choosing not to participate that should not be viewed as personally pathologizing, but rather are informed by the ways the university as historical institution is raced, classed, and gendered.

Third, the studies together suggest the importance for students to be able to find ways to combine their personal interests with the learning and writing expected of them in their coursework. Herrington and Curtis (2000) in particular take the view that writing development is the writer's struggle to compose a public self that is acceptable both to him or herself and to his or her audience. Though they do not present their findings in such a fully theorized way, Carroll (2002) and Sommers and Saltz (2004) certainly support the notion of students feeling the need to connect the personal with the academic, and associating success with being able to do so. Sternglass (1997) makes the finding the lynchpin of her book's argument, stating that "the integration of students previous life experiences into their academic studies allows them to analyze, critique, modify, and apply the worldviews they held previously to their new learnings" (*xv*) and suggests that teachers are doing a personal and political disservice if they disallow such integration between students' lives and academic writing topics.

Last, the studies agree that the place to look for development in student writing is not in within the four corners of the page of any single text they produce, but in their talk and understanding of what is expected of them across a variety of contexts—in their increasing sense of flexibility *and* adeptness at transferring that flexibility into writing that meets the expectations of varied audiences. Nearly all of the studies relate how students became savvier at understanding the preferences of their instructors, which may

be viewed narrowly at attempts to teacher please and earn high grades. Those grade-based motives notwithstanding, the flexibility such rhetorical moves requires is significant, and Carroll (2002) notes that as students take on a more participatory role in a discourse community they begin to view requirements of a text being more governed by the norms of the field or discipline and less a function of individual teacher's idiosyncrasy.

All of these findings align in some ways with the approach Walvood and McCarthy (1990) take to their longitudinal cross-disciplinary study of college writers. Most notable from their work is the focus on the roles students take as writers, highlighting the social aspects of thinking and writing behaviors as means of constructing relationships. They found that three roles helped explain student writing behavior across a variety of contexts: that of a *text processor* (one merely recycling text to demonstrate knowledge of the text), a *layperson* (one engaged in disciplinary knowledge as an outsider), and a *professional in training* (one engaged in disciplinary learning as an insider). Most writing tasks in discipline-specific classes required the adoption of the professional in training role, but not all students were adept at taking it on, instead relying more heavily on their habits as text processors or laypeople.

Student Voice in the College Readiness Question

The selection of student-authored essays contained in the two NCTE collections (Sullivan & Tinberg, eds., 2006; Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, eds., 2010) offers additional insight to what it means to develop as writer from high school to college. First, though, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this small collection of essays, specifically that they are all written by students who have ostensibly succeeded as college

writers and are now telling their story *through* academic writing for an audience of professional educators. Many of them have affiliations with their college or university writing centers, which only adds to the skew toward knowing, insider competence the selection brings to the conversation. Despite this weakness as a collection stemming from a fundamental lack of diversity in the sample, the published student essays offer a range of ways to think about the transition from high school to college writing, directly from students.

Kimberly Nelson (2006), for example, explains how she drew on a familiar practice in her past—participating in a focused writing group she had first experienced in a high school Advanced Placement class—and created new opportunities to talk through her ideas with her family and fellow students in her dorm. Her essay's focus on talk and the avenues it provides for idea generation aligns with her explicitly stated definition of college-level writing as "not merely a list of skills, but rather … as much about process as it is about product" (p. 293). While this conclusion may seem cliché, it is important to honor still the profundity of a familiar idea; her essay traces the trajectory of a practice, narrating a history and development of participation in social groups to support her work as a writer. The fact that she found new ways to engage conversants in her process does indeed seem a sign of development from a sociocultural perspective. That the other student essays remain significantly more focused on form or individual development only highlights the importance of this student's story.

Casey Maliszewski's (2010) chapter offers the most contrast to Nelson's, as she cites as a "major breakthrough" the development of a stronger thesis, which she describes as "more balanced (i.e., not too narrow, not too broad)…[and representing] a more

complex argument that came from reading beneath the text to determine broader patterns" (p. 264). Continuing the students' focus on the important role of certain textual features is Mike Quilligan's (2006) essay in which he characterizes the development of a truly argumentative thesis as "the trick" (p. 297) to good college writing, the result of the university "breaking incoming students of…the habit" of mere exposition (p. 298). In an interesting contrast to Blau's (2006) rather nurturing introduction to a writing community, Quilligan discusses his university's success in socializing student writers with relatively violent imagery. He speaks in terms of "uncivilized" high schoolers—himself included—arriving at the university to be "civilized" into argumentation, while Blau approaches the matter from a more sociocultural perspective, viewing the students' current stances and skills as resources to be drawn from.

All but one of the student essays remain located exclusively in the realm of academic writing to describe college-level writing or their development as college writers. Steven Schmidt's (2010) essay differs as he traces from his years in high school when he would write poetry to combat the boredom he felt with school-based assignments and explains how his job in the tech industry after high school (but before college) brought him into a discourse community that valued writing that was "focused, comprehensive, and clear" (p. 268). He also describes the public/personal writing he engaged in while undergoing cancer treatment, using a blog to "deal with the toll of the chemicals and emotions" associated with treatment and to mediate the physical distance between him and his family (p. 269). Though he does not draw together all the currents of development he discusses, his essay certainly offers a glimpse into the ways that student

learning about writing in out-of-school contexts might be flexibly drawn on in academic settings.

While not student authored itself, Bergman and Zepernick's (2007) study of how students perceive their own process of learning to write adds to the student perspectives from the essays. Drawing on interviews of high achieving students who came to college well-prepared based on most traditional achievement indicators, they found that students saw a significant divide between the writing they did for their first-year composition class (labeled as an English class) and the writing they did in the disciplines. Students viewed English teacher feedback as less valid than feedback in "disciplinary" courses and considered the writing they learned there to be more natural and idiosyncratic. Writing in the disciplines, on the other hand, required "a very strong acceptance of the authority of disciplinary standards, conventions, and expectations" (p. 129). Echoing earlier cited-research, especially Durst (1999), students in this study cited knowledge and perhaps even admiration of a thoroughly developed process approach to writing, but admitted to their practice being highly focused on product. For the students in this study, notions of audience were tightly bounded by the classroom context, with the student writer's job being to discover what the particular teacher wants and finding a way to deliver that kind of writing.

Theoretical Framework: Views on the Concept of *Development* in Writing

Although not everything that occurs to students in their transition from high school to college as writers might be characterized as *development*, the concept is central to the conversations about college readiness and the transition to college writing and is, consequently, the dominant theoretical concern for this project. I will begin this section

by discussing views of development that focus on *product* and *process*, as these views are certainly the most influential in K-12 school curriculum and instruction. I will include in this discussion analysis of the Common Core Standards for Writing (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010) for their illustration of development in terms of product and process.

I will then turn my attention to more socioculturally informed notions of development in response to Duncheon and Tierney's (2014) call for an understanding of college readiness that takes a more nuanced view of writing, including attention to the social and personal significance of writing, with emphasis on the important role that specific contexts play in writing development, as opposed to a "a catalog of cognitive skills [that] cannot capture the process of meaning making and self-discovery that writing facilitates" (p. 216).

Product- and Process-based Models of Writing Development

In their introductions to more socioculturally informed definitions of development, Applebee (2000) and Schultz and Fecho (2000) summarize views of development that have had strong influence on curriculum, teaching, and learning in schools—that is, views that suggest writing development is most evident in changes in the written product or the writing process, but not necessarily in the writers themselves. Applebee (2000) notes that traditional discussions of development have "emphasized purposes for writing, fluency and writing conventions, the structure of the final product, or strategic knowledge" (p. 92). In a similar vein, Schultz and Fecho (2000) argue that earlier models of writing development have viewed writing as a series of skill-based stages that students move through, including "mastery of conventions such as spelling, discourse structures, and revision" (p. 54). While these descriptions do not provide

distinctions between product and process models, they share a focus on decontextualized writing work and locate development in the text or the immediate processes associated with its production.

Andrews and Smith (2011) review more extensively both product-related and process-related models. They point out that product-centered models typically focus on on development of greater syntactical sophistication in written pieces and growing familiarity with more (and more sophisticated) rhetorical modes. Process-related models, on the other hand, emphasize students' abilities to improve their written product with changes between drafts and the development of more automatic use of writing strategies at certain stages in the writing process. In their discussion of the process movement, they call attention to the dominance of cognitive approaches to development as indicated by improved ability to problem solve, set specific goals, monitor, and move between processes.

As useful as developmental views focusing solely on product may be in providing general guidance on what student writing "should" look like from grade to grade, there is wide agreement concerning the limitations of such views, namely the potential for creation of ideal models of texts that students should be able to produce at specific times in their academic careers, thus creating the illusion of a linear path of development for all students to follow (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Dyson & Freedman, 2003). Most studies of writing product development also suffer from an overly narrow focus on school-based writing, so the developmental trajectory of a child is less about the *child's development* and more about the curricular tasks with which he or she was asked to engage (Applebee, 2000).

Developmental models focusing on process are less common, so there is less consensus on either their benefits or limitations, but Andrews and Smith (2011) point out that process-based development still largely focuses on improvements to texts, and therefore remain largely bound to end products as a sign of development. In either case, a developmental model focused on product or process will likely see writing as an act separated from the development of the writer as an active participant in multiple social worlds, reducing the concept of growth to production of more "accurate" text or sophisticated metacognition, without concern for the writer's understanding of how "accuracy" is shaped by social expectations or how metacognition is tied to their identities as a writer or the way in which they wish to position themselves to others through text.

The CCSS as a Model of Writing Development

I will offer a brief discussion of the Common Core State Standards for Writing (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010) at this point because of their political dominance at the time in which the students in this study moved through high school *and* for the ways in which they illuminate the drawbacks of a particular model of development that is rooted in product- and process-based views. The CCSS Standards for Writing consist of ten anchor standards with corresponding grade-specific standards fleshed out for K-8 and grade band standards for 9-10 and 11-12. These standards are organized into four categories: "Text Types and Purposes" (Standards W1-W3), "Production and Distribution of Writing" (W4-W6), "Research to Build and Produce Knowledge" (W7-W9), and "Range of Writing" (W10). The CCSS for writing are nearly unapologetic in their *autonomous view* of literacy and literacy development (Botzakis, Burns, & Hall, 2014; Street, 1984), as

evidenced by the prefatory language for the 6-12 writing standards that call for instruction that will "ensure" that students "gain adequate mastery of a range of skills and applications," to "meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades" with the flattened, singular goal of achieving College and Career Readiness (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 19).

The path of development under the CCSS is clear, linear, and predictable, with the three separable text types (argument, exposition, narration) each broken into five or six features that become more complex grade after grade, a hallmark of models with a focus on product features as signs of development. While in the marginalia of the document, the standards also call for development of "complex and nuanced writing" (NGAOBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 41), urging students to "use a blend of the three text types [argument, informative, narrative]" (NGAOBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 24) to accomplish complex purposes, the standards themselves treat school-based writing as one of three neatly recognizable types, increasing in sophistication and complexity in predictable increments.

As focused as the document is on observable features of specific text types, the CCSS do, in fact, also advocate for participation in a process approach. As Andrews and Smith (2011) point out, however, a document with such wide-reaching intent as the CCSS has difficulty imparting the richness of a process pedagogy such as "developing positive dispositions toward writing [and] student choice and discovery through writing" (p. 67) and instead represents something much more "streamlined as to be mere shells of the theory and pedagogy" associated with the writing process (p. 68).

Anchor Standard W5 calls for students to "develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach" (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 41). This language remains constant in each grade-level standard, but in order to suggest a path for development, students are expected to engage in the writing process "with some guidance and support from peers and adults" in middle school, but by grade 9, the language calling for "guidance and support from peers and adults" is gone (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 21).

This omission seems not a trivial change, but rather an indication of the standards' ideology toward the social nature of writing, with earlier grades calling for "support"—more than "some"—but only from adults. Peers are later added as a source of support, but the amount reduces to "some." By high school, the seeming expectation is that students are writing "on their own," a phenomenon Andrews and Smith (2011) attribute to "the US ideal of creating an independent learner" (p. 71) as opposed to other views that recognize that writers are always potentially in need of help as they encounter new challenges and that collaborative composing is a valuable skill in its own right.

The CCSS approach to theorizing a developmental path for engaging with the writing process suggests the difficulty, and perhaps futility, of such a task. But the writing standards' reference to *flexibility*, a widely-agreed upon goal for writers—indeed a sign of development from a sociocultural perspective, as students learn to craft language for communication and participation in increasingly diverse situations and practices (Bruner, 1996; Calkins, 1994; CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011; Dean, 2010; Dyson, 1995; Sleeter, 2005)—is particularly jarring. The standards suggest that students

develop *flexibility*, but in a limited way, in the same sidebar text calling for complexity and nuance noted above:

> [Students] must have the flexibility, concentration, and fluency to produce high-quality first-draft text under a tight deadline as well as the capacity to revisit and make improvements to a piece of writing over multiple drafts when circumstances encourage or require it. (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 41)

Reducing the concept of flexibility so drastically reveals, perhaps, the tipping point in the CCSS' tension between developing writers who engage in complex processes and developing quality written products as measured by single-sitting assessments, the way in which they are ultimately measured.

Beck (2009), however, offers a means by which to view the limitations of developmental models based on process or product as assets when she argues that all writing tasks involve intimately related *cognitive* (process), *textual* (product), and *social* dimensions but that "the true significance of cognitive and textual aspects of any acts of composition cannot be understood apart from the social context of the act" (p. 313). She specifically notes the importance of the social aspect of composition in the study of the transition from high school to college, with the shifts in context laminating nearly everything a student does and learns. With this view in mind, I will turn now to notions of development that still acknowledge the ways in which *texts* and *student writing processes* change—certainly noteworthy as aspects of a writer's transition to college—but informed by a more fully realized sociocultural, contextual perspective.

Sociocultural Views of Writing Development

Broadly speaking, this project is informed by a sociocultural view of writing that contends "writing is learned in social contexts, establishes social relationships, changes social relationships, and accomplishes social action" (Bazerman, 2015a, p. 11). Such a view considers writing not as governed by a set of neutral, externally imposed set of rules, but rather as situated in specific social contexts, improvised by individuals with agency and purpose, and mediated by social and institutional factors (Prior, 2006). A sociocultural view of writing development, then, sees a writer's progress being revealed in broad patterns across time and contends that "these patterns are not likely to display smooth forward motion, but rather will be characterized by ups and downs" related to all of the contextual factors that surround and animate a writing event; in other words, no single developmental template exists for all learners (Dyson & Freedman, 2003, p. 973).

More specifically, in order to illuminate the evidence and significance of students' development in their transition to writing in college, I will take the position that writing development is both signified and supported by increased participation in meaningful social contexts. Writing development also involves the generation of new understandings of how writing mediates specific social relationships, including accepting or rejecting new identities that present themselves to writers as they engage in new or unfamiliar writing activities.

Applebee (2000) argues for a view of writing development framed around *social action*, evidenced by increased participation in significant domains, including learning the valued knowledge and current conversations in those domains, as well as the writing

forms that allow one to make a contribution to those conversations. Wardle and Roozen suggest (2012), albeit as part of a critique of the limits of this view (discussed more thoroughly below), that this definition, focused on "increasing facility with a particular community's activities and practices through repeated engagement over time" (p. 108) is the dominant view of writing development within the field of writing studies. Importantly, these definitions, along with concepts such as *situated learning* and *legitimate peripheral participation* put forth by Lave and Wenger (1991), do not try to separate language, knowledge, action, reasoning, and context, but see them as integrally related and reciprocal. Learning to write in new contexts, then, may involve new textual forms or features, but they are not of interest on their own. Only when considered within the larger context, be it a relationship, an academic discipline, a classroom, do those features take developmental significance.

Because of the intensely connected relationships between writing, writer, and context, it stands to reason that development also involves forming more complex understandings of how writing functions as a mediator of social relationships. Beach, Newell, and VanDerHeide (2015) argue that writing development involves not just participating in new social contexts but in fact means "constructing social and cultural contexts" (p. 90) through writing. Consequently, writing development involves the complex process of negotiating new identities as a writer, choices of whether to accept or reject new roles that are constructed through language use in social settings (Dyson, 1995; Ivanič, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Bartholomae (1986) famously argues that in order to appropriate new discourses, university students "have to [use language] as though they were easily and comfortably one with their audience," (p. 4) to "take on the

role—the voice, the person—of an authority whose authorship is rooted in scholarship, analysis, or research" (p. 6). Wardle and Roozen (2012) note the "profound connection between writing and the production of literate identity" (p. 110), an aspect of development echoed by Schultz and Fecho (2000) when they note the power of writing to shape social identity.

Significant to this project, though, will be broadening the notion of context and identity as university student beyond the writer in the classroom setting to acknowledge that college students are writing not just papers and reports in their classrooms, but they are also composing emails to professors and participating in ongoing conversations on social media platforms. Paying attention to these writing acts outside the classroom responds, at least in part, to Wardle and Roozen's (2012) call to resist narrow definitions of writing in college and rather embrace what they refer to as an *ecological model* of writing development, understanding that "an individual's writing abilities [develop] across an expansive network that links together a broad range of literate experiences over lengthy periods of time" (p. 108).

To that point, while Bartholmae's concerns for identity work referenced above are tied to power differentials shaped by knowledge and experience gaps in the academic disciplines, college students also face writing situations that are framed more broadly around institutional power. Andrews and Smith (2011) note that a fuller model of development will take into account the concept of power in the rhetorical situation, such as students' choices of "language that will persuade the powerful to listen and move towards the less powerful person" (p. 132). Similarly, Bazerman (2015a) acknowledges that writers learn that writing can have "material consequences" and writers can "assert

new meanings into situations," which may not be evident directly in class-based writing, but occurs in writing within the institutional context, such as direct communication with teachers or other official university bodies (p. 14).

So, while it would clearly be problematic to ignore evidence of development that resides in changes in written product or process, this project will take as its primary focus the description of development of the individual students in their contexts of transition, or put another way, the development of "writers who...are *people* who develop...not only maturationally and cognitively, but also socially, experientially, and globally by being exposed to different worlds, different people, different communities" (Andrews & Smith, 2011, p. 41). More than merely being *exposed* to different world, though, this project will consider development in the transition to college writing "beyond the passive individual shaped by socializing agents, to make room for the active, constructing, transforming [or resisting] person" (Miller & Goodnow, 1995).

Conclusion

The literature considered in this review suggests that while we know a great deal about how students make the transition from high school to college as writers, there is certainly a need for additional study. In particular, the valuable approaches in examining students' flexibility in writing process across the high school/college divide (Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Nelson, 2006; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011) can be combined with approaches from studies that examine attitudinal and contextual shifts across longer periods (Carroll, 2002; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Sommers & Saltz, 2004; Sternglass, 1997; Walvood and McCarthy, 1990) to better understand how all these facets of change work together. Given our understanding that high school and college are indeed different kinds of places,

from the writing that occurs in each (Applebee & Langer, 2013; Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009; Scherff & Piazza, 2005; Sullivan, 2006) to their fundamental purposes and structures (Addison & McGee, 2009; Blau, 2006; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010), additional study that takes the specifics of students' high school context into account—rather than privileging the university experience as the center of inquiry—can offer insight into how students negotiate the transition.

At the moment, a national standards and accountability movement asserts the acquisition of certain predictable skills can guarantee success at every college and in all careers, suggesting that the best preparation for students is to further standardize high school writing and learning experiences. At the same time, the field acknowledges that students will encounter varying forms of writing in college, with expectations that will vary from class to class and instructor to instructor, privileging students who are not "well trained" in one view of writing but, rather, flexible across many (Sullivan & Tinberg, eds., 2006; Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, eds., 2010). Using conceptual tools rooted in the sociocultural tradition (Andrews & Smith, 2011; Applebee, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Schultz & Fecho, 2000) informed by the field's existing knowledge about becoming a college writer has the potential to help both categories of institutions—high schools and colleges—learn *from* students about how to best support their development across contexts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Purpose and Overview of Study Design

The purpose of this study is to examine the transition from high school to college for 8 writers in the broadest sense possible, beyond whether and how they became more proficient at producing academic text, to an understanding of how the transition played a role in their larger life narratives as students, writers, and people. The project consists of multiple case studies developed over three semesters of data collection, offering the perspectives of each participant gained through a combination of interviews, student-produced documents, and think-alouds generated while reading and composing academic text. These perspectives are contextualized by interviews with student-selected influential writing teachers and a family member who extended the story of the students' experiences in school. The cases, while informative on their own, together present "syntheses of understandings that come about by combining different individual's detailed reports of a particular event...interpreted through the interviewees' own cultural lenses" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 29-30).

This project is designed using Stake's (1994) concept of the *collective case study*, in which the individual cases "may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each having voice [and] are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (p. 237). A case study approach was appropriate for this project because its focus and questions represent "complex social phenomena" that require the retention of "the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2002, p. 2). Even more

importantly, the development of writers through the transition from high school to college represents a situation in which "the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident," a key defining factor of case study research, in Yin's (2002) view (p. 13).

Individual cases were still the object of initial inquiry, allowing for application of traditional methods and approaches associated case study research (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007, p. 69), but the desire to understand how the concept of the college transition differs by student and by institutional context made a collective case study design particularly apt. My goal for this project, though, "is not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (Stake, 1994, p. 244), but I do wish to contribute to a greater understanding of the larger phenomenon of college readiness. Multiple cases, represented in their own right, were therefore studied not in an attempt to provide a representative sample of a population (and therefore offer statistical generalizations about what it means to "become a typical college writer"), but rather to expand and generalize theories about the ways that transition happens for different students across different contexts (Yin, 2002, p. 10).

Research Questions

The questions I used to focus my data collection and analysis were informed by Yin's (2002) view that the purpose of a literature review is to "develop sharper and more insightful questions about the topic" under study (p. 9). The following represent questions that have been shaped and sharpened by the review of existing literature and consideration of the theoretical frame:

- From a student's point of view, what does it mean to "become" a college writer?
- How do students decide when to adopt, adapt, or abandon a writing practice?

- What instructional contexts or practices do students view as supporting—or impeding—the transition from high school to college as writers?
- How does the transition to college contribute to students' larger life narratives as literate people?

These questions were designed to keep the students' views of the transition at the center of this project while also linking students' developing views of what becoming a "college-level" writer means to the changes in writing process they employ. If a common view in the literature is that recently graduated high school writers have to change or abandon many of the practices that they used in high school (Blau, 2006; Hassel & Giordano, 2009), these questions seek to investigate the validity of such an assumption and the means by which students' existing writing resources are altered or new ones are developed when students find it necessary.

The open-ended nature of my research questions allowed for application of a number of the concepts from the literature review, from the roles students see themselves taking on as writers, to an examination of new attitudes they take, to the ways in which these changes informed their decisions about how to build knowledge and shift processes. Together, these questions also sought to keep student writing as fully contextualized as possible, recognizing that students are bringing with them a lifetime of experience to a notebook or laptop when they write.

Site Selection

Midtown High School, one of two comprehensive high schools serving a small urban community in the Midwest, is the site from which I recruited participants. According to the most recent state school report card, the demographics of Midtown High were 43% White, 36% Black, 8.7% Hispanic, 7.7% Asian, .1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific

Islander, .5% American Indian, and 3.1% two or more races, with an overall student population around 1300. Just over half (52.9%) of the students were considered low income by official standards; 16.8% received special education services; and 4.7% were considered limited English proficient. Eighty percent of students graduated within four years (compared to 82.3% for the state), and most recent state achievement data in reading found that 44.8% of the junior class met standards (compared to 50.7% for the state). No assessment data was available for writing, as it was not part of the state's assessment for 11th grade students at the time this data was generated.

According to the district's high school curriculum handbook, students at Midtown High can take English (and several other classes) at the academic (lower) or honors (higher) level. English classes for 9th through 11th grade students are literature-based, with writing integrated into instruction. Twelfth grade students enrolled in academic or honors level classes take a semester of literature and a semester of rhetoric (writing), although they can also opt to take year-long courses: Advanced Placement Literature and Composition or a dual credit composition course coordinated with a nearby community college.

Midtown High School served as the contextual setting for the first phase of the study during students' senior year of high school, with their choice of postsecondary institution determining the setting for the second phase, each student's first year of college or university study. Participants attended one of four institutions:

- Junior College, an open enrollment institution located in the same town as Midtown High that enrolls approximately 3,500 full-time students and 6,000 part-

time students, roughly equally females and males. The student body is 29% non-white/minority, according to the college website.

- Small State University, located within an hour's drive from Midtown High, is a public institution that enrolls approximately 18,500 undergraduates and 2,500 graduate students. According to the university website, 54% of students are women and 22.3% of students are minorities (with American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or Two or More Race Selections grouped together in this category).
- Big State University, located in the same town as Midtown High, is a public institution that enrolls approximately 33,500 undergraduates and 10,500 graduate students. The university website reports the demographic breakdown of the student body as African American (5.2%), Asian (14.8%), Hispanic (8.8%), Multiracial (2.6%), Native American/Alaska Native (0.1%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (.1%), White (44%), and International (23.8%).
- Private University, located in a major metropolitan area a few hours away, is a private institution that enrolls approximately 15,500 undergraduates and 7,000 graduate students. The university website indicates that 53% of students are female and 36% of enrollees are "students of color."

Participants

Participants in this study are either students, to whom I refer as *primary participants*, or students' family members or current/former teachers, to whom I refer as *secondary participants*.

Primary Participants

I sought to recruit 10 students from the Midtown High senior class by attending an English department meeting, describing the nature of the study, and requesting names of students who had expressed plans to attend college (whether a two- or four-year institution) and who, collectively, might represent a diverse balance of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and perceived ability in academic writing. Because of my agreement with Rubin and Rubin (2005) that "reality is complex," I sought to "gather contradictory or overlapping perceptions and nuanced understandings" from students who would have varied "vantage points" (p. 67).

I also asked teachers to consider students who, in their view, seemed likely to be willing to stay with a project that spanned three semesters and required them to keep some data on their own. While this approach is problematic in that it asked teachers to ascribe these traits to a particular potential participant, it is consonant with Stake's (1994) belief that the best cases are those "from which we feel we can learn the most [which] may mean taking the one that we can spend the most time with" (p. 243). Stake goes on to argue that "potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness," noting that "it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a magnificently typical case" (p. 243).

I collected the names of 20 potential students and approached each personally to share the recruitment letter. I invited each of these students to a meeting over their lunch hour (all seniors at Midtown eat lunch at the same time), provided them with lunch, and reviewed the goals of the study and the requirements for/benefits of participation. At the end of the meeting, I asked students who were still interested in participating to write on

a notecard their name, gender, racial/ethnic identity, current English class, and the type of institution they planned to attend in the fall, along with their intended major or field of study.

From this group, I selected ten students, whose pseudonyms and demographic information are summarized in the Table 1 below:

Table 1. Primary participants

Name	Ethnicity/ Gender	English Class	Institution	Major	First Generation?
Anna	White/ Female	AP Eng	Private U	Journalism	No
Calvin	AA/Male	Honors Eng	JuCo	Undeclared (Hist Ed)	Yes
Carter	White/Male	Honors Eng	JuCo	Graphic Design	No
D'Metra	AA/Female	Honors Eng	Small State	History Ed	Yes
Elijah	AA/Male (ELL)	Reg Eng	JuCo	Undecided→Business	Yes
Kendra	AA & Latina/ Female	AP Eng	Private U	Pre-Med→English	No
Valorous	AA/Female	DC Eng	JuCo	Elementary Ed	Yes
Zarina	Asian/ Female	AP Eng	Big State	Chemical Engineering	No
James*	Asian/Male	DC Eng	Private U 2	Pharmacy	Yes
Aarif*	White & Asian/Male	AP Eng	Big State	Environmental Ethics	No

*Note: James and Aarif both withdrew from the study before the end of their senior year, so none of their data is presented in this project.

I then shared consent forms with each of the participants. Taris (2000) discusses the risk of *wave non-response*, in which participants in longitudinal studies progressively respond in fewer numbers at each stage of data collection. I worked to mitigate this possibility by explaining at the point of participant recruitment the commitment and data collection calendar; by ending each data collection cycle with confirmation of date and contact information for the next collection cycle; and by maximizing the sense of reward

in participation in the study. These benefits included the incremental monetary remuneration totaling $100 per participant, knowledge of the importance of the study, and the potential benefit of being a better writer by being asked to pay attention to how they are developing as writers in a more self-aware way than a non-participating student might. Other than the two participants who withdrew in phase one, the remaining students stayed in the study until the end of their first year. Multiple students reported enjoying the opportunity to talk with someone interested about their college experiences and to return to Midtown High for interviews.

Secondary Participants

In the initial one-on-one meeting, I asked each of the students to identify secondary participants: a family member (or another person with deep knowledge of the student) and one or two current or former teachers who they felt were influential in their lives as a writer. All students but Calvin and Elijah provided a family member or knowledgeable other. Calvin's parents and caregivers were all deceased, and he was staying temporarily with an uncle at the time of the study's launch. Though Elijah lived with his father and step-mother in the U.S., he nominated his mother for this project, but geographical and language constraints (she lives in Gabon and speaks only French) precluded her participation. He did not think his father had sufficient knowledge of his early school years since he had moved to the U.S. when Elijah was still a small child in Gabon. All students provided influential writing teachers resulting in a list of eight different teachers, all of whom taught English despite my explanation that it could be a teacher from any subject. Calvin's nominated teachers, however, had retired or had moved. Despite efforts to contact them, I was unable to schedule interviews.

Data Collection

This study employed a modified *time series analysis* approach (Taris, 2000), appropriate when the goal is to assess (or in this case, understand) change within individuals across time. Such an approach uses a set of repeated measures with the same limited number of participants to provide descriptive and explanatory information about behaviors and attitudes over time. My modification to this approach was the relatively loose interpretation of "repeated measures" in the sense that data collected at the end of each of the three semesters of the study was similar, but not strictly identical, because I tailored interview questions to the developing threads and issues of the students' experiences. The discussion below represents my attempt to represent my cases holistically, while still needing to "break off a piece of the world that is normally integrated" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 60). My aim was to "break off" enough of the right pieces of these students' transitions to college to present cases that are as complete and accurate as possible, representing foremost their views of that transition.

Data Collection from Primary Participants

Because the primary purpose of this study is to understand the transition from high school to college writing from the students' points of view, participant interviews played the central role in the data collection plan. Yin (2009) describes interviews as "essential sources of case study information" and encourages interviews that are more like "guided conversations…than structured queries" (p. 89). The interviews took a semi-structured approach, allowing for some consistency across participants and across interview intervals, but also allowing the participant's point of view to take precedence over a set of prescribed questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Krathwol, 2009). The

freedom to alter questions as necessary given the specific experiences and stories of each student acknowledges that, in Rubin and Rubin's (2005) view, an interview is "a window on a time and a social world that is experienced one person at a time, one incident at a time" and must be flexible (p. 14). Table 2 below summarizes the data collected from various participants through the three phases of the study.

Table 2. Data collection across the three phases of the study

Spring 2015	Fall 2015	Spring 2016
Primary participants • Student Interview • Copy of all school-based writing • Process log for one writing assignment • Think-aloud on a reading and writing task **Secondary participants** • Interview of 1-2 influential writing teacher(s) • Interview of family member	**Primary participants** • Student Interview • Copy of all school-based writing • Process log for one writing assignment Note: For the two students on trimester schedule, an additional iteration of this data was collected Winter 2016	**Primary participants** • Student Interview • Copy of all school-based writing • Process log for one writing assignment • Think-aloud on a reading and writing task • Group interview on HS-college transition

The initial interviews aimed to establish an understanding of students' attitudes toward writing and learning in school, addressing conceptions of writing process, college-readiness and useful/un-useful learning contexts. Follow-up interviews inquired into the post-secondary context, writing expectations, and perceived changes or differences between high school and college[5]. I conducted these interviews with participants at the end of each semester: in the spring of high school senior year and fall

[5] Base questions for all interviews, as well as templates for other measures, can be found in Appendix A.

and spring of first year of post-secondary. Anna and Kendra attended an institution on a trimester system, requiring an additional interview in midwinter. For the first interviews, I also asked students to bring representative samples of writing from their past, as available, to acknowledge that the transition to college writing is not an "event" that occurs only in students' senior year.

Taken as a whole, these interviews sought both to obtain from participants "the facts of a matter as well as their opinions about events…as well as other sources of evidence" to pursue (Yin, 2009, p. 90). In all interviews and interactions with students, I stressed the separation between my identity as a teacher and a researcher, reminding them that their concern should not be providing answers that please a teacher or tell the story they think school expects of them, but rather their own experiences and points of view.

In an attempt to trace trajectories of practice across time and spaces, I asked participants to select a piece of writing in each semester at the time it was assigned and keep a writing process log that would help them to keep track of how they went about approaching the assignment, and why. Because I did not have immediate access to the participants in their postsecondary contexts, this log helped bridge the gap between an in-process protocol and a retrospective one (Smagorinsky, 2008). Discussion of the logs and the written piece occurred during, or as the second half of, the interviews. Interviews were held in a private, non-instructional space at Midtown High, typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were held over student lunch hours, at their suggestion, with all interviews requiring multiple meetings given the nature of the school day.

At the first and third interviews, I asked each student to engage in a think-aloud writing protocol (e.g., Emig, 1970) asking students to read a short argumentative piece

and write a first draft of a critique of the article. In the first-phase think-aloud, students read and responded to Frank Bruni's (2014) *New York Times* op-ed "The Wilds of Education," a critique of censorship and trigger warnings in college classrooms. In the second phase think-aloud, I chose a shorter piece to allow more time for writing and discussion: Kirsten West Savali's (2015) online article "Why We Should Keep Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks Off the $20 Bill." These conversations also took place in private, non-instructional spaces at Midtown High and typically lasted around 45 minutes. Students took up the task differently, with some drafting essays during the time, some talking about what they would write, and most doing a combination of the two.

The function of this data was twofold: First, it helped me establish a baseline sense of the writer's awareness of writing processes that I could compare later to a similar task after a year of college. Second, and more importantly, it helped shape additional conversations with participants about how and why they decide to use a particular rhetorical strategy (as well as how and where the student learned to employ it). Though there is no such thing as a "college-level writing assignment," this task employed both reading and writing and focused on student critique of the text, not simply summary of it, features that many agree help to define writing at the college level (Carroll, 2002; NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010; Sullivan, 2006). The conversations during and after think-alouds often veered usefully from the particular task at hand and involved topics about other written pieces and other experiences.

In addition to the three one-on-one interactions with participants, I held a closing focus group with all the participants to allow them to speak freely about their experiences with the transition from high school to college writing and explore together the

differences among their contexts (Dressman, 2008). Valorous was unable to attend, and I opted not to invite Calvin because he had withdrawn from college in his second semester and shared with me in his final interview that very few other people knew. He expressed that he preferred to keep the circumstance private, so I did not wish to put him in this potentially vulnerable situation.

To provide context for and nuance and verification to the data that focuses heavily on the participants' perspectives—interviews, logs, and process protocols—I collected data that speaks to the classroom and institutional contexts of the participants. This information included teacher-created writing assignments and official statistics on each of the institution's enrollment data. Very few students kept or could obtain writing assignments at the time of the interviews. I much more successfully collected clean copies of student writing representing each school assignment. Most students provided copies of all of their writing, though I cannot be sure that what students shared represents the entirety of writing for any particular class or semester. While I asked students about feedback that they found useful and un-useful, I did not collect written feedback of instructors who would not know their writing is being used as data in a study.

Data Collection from Secondary Participants

To add depth to students' life stories and histories with school, I asked each participant to name a family member (or other person of the student's choosing) who was most familiar with his or her life and experiences in school. I requested an interview with each of these nominated family members, but the inability to obtain this data did not exclude the student from participation in the study. These interviews were held either at Midtown High, at the local public library, or in the family member's home, depending on

which they preferred. These interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. My goal here was to involve a second participant in the construction of a *topical life document* (Plummer, 2004), a life history document that "does not aim to grasp the fullness of a person's life but confronts a particular issue" (p. 565). Involvement of a second party in the construction of the primary participant's life story was appropriate in this case because I asked for information about the students' early, even pre-, school experiences. I also used these family interviews to confirm or further explore certain topics that came up in the student interviews. While information gained from the family interviews was not uniformly illuminating across every participant in the project, the discussions with a family member helped me get to know students in a more general sense and helped establish deeper connections to participants.

To provide additional contextual information about students' high school writing experiences, I asked each participant to name one or two influential teachers from their current or past school setting that I could interview about the kinds of writing students do (or did) in those classes. I refrained from asking those teachers to speak about the students themselves, both to protect those students' privacy and to acknowledge the uncertainty of the accuracy of those teachers' memories about the writing of a single, particular student from up to 3 years ago. The exception to this was D'Metra's and Valorous' nomination of Ms. Banner, who had been their English teacher and Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher[6]. Both students talked about

[6] According to Ms. Banner, D'Metra, and Valorous, AVID is a multi-year elective class designed to support first-generation college students in preparation for the transition to college. It includes lessons on various aspects of college preparation as well as twice weekly tutorials in which students collaboratively discuss challenging content and questions from their classes. Ms. Banner explained that, from her point of view, the relationships formed in the class are of greater significance than the curriculum and course content.

Ms. Banner having a role in their lives different from any of the other student-teacher relationships in the study, so I requested their permission to talk with Ms. Banner directly about them.

Data Analysis

To prepare for data analysis, I first transcribed all interviews and then listened to each recording again to ensure transcripts were as clean and error-free as possible. My approach to analysis was inductive and participant centered; I did not enter into analysis with a prescribed set of codes, but rather detected patterns that described and interpreted the data, using (when possible) the language of participants to name the codes. Overall, I viewed the process as an attempt to "make new discoveries, insights, and connections about...participants, their processes, [and] the phenomena under investigation" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 51). One advantage to the relatively evenly spaced data collection intervals was the affordance of preliminary data analysis in process. Using the *constant comparative method* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Harding, 2004), I engaged in preliminary coding and analysis early in the study, adding new concepts as they emerged from data and using this analysis to guide further collection of data as each semester progressed.

Because the data sources were so different and were collected to answer different aspects of the project's inquiry, I analyzed them differentially. I approached coding as "an exploratory problem-solving technique without a specific formula" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 8), but with a focused plan. I coded student writing descriptively, making note of features that matter from a basic standpoint (length, topic/assignment, writing type) and features that students indicated as important in their discussion of college writing (did it include sources, was it part of a larger project, was a structure provided, was a prompt provided).

A sample student writing catalog with codes can be found in Appendix B[7]. I coded teacher interviews descriptively to get an early sense of the teachers' perspectives, but did not do focused coding until I knew what aspects of the students' experiences I needed to contextualize. In other words, the analysis of the student interviews generated internal questions that I then used the teacher interview data to answer.

After transcribing student interviews, I performed initial descriptive coding loosely guided by the model provided by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), focusing on broad facets of the data such as *setting/context*, *definition of situation*, *perspectives*, *thoughts about people*, *processes*, *activities*, *events*, *strategies*, and *relationships* and *social structures*. I then coded the family interviews in light of what I learned from the student interviews and used these two early data sources to write in the first summer of the project analytic memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 123) about students' identities as writers, experiences with writing, and definitions of development.

In a process adapted from Stake (2006) involving multiple passes over individual student data and across the data set, I defined and refined codes over the course of the project in ways that were consonant with the theoretical frame, developing them, as Smagorinsky (2008) describes, "in a dialectic relation among the data, the theoretical framework, and whatever else a researcher brings to the analytic process" (p. 406). Specifically, I read student interviews in various combinations, relative to their timing within the data collection process and in light of the other data collected. In the first and second iterations in summer 2015 and winter 2015, for example, I read and annotated

[7] For the purposes of this project, all written text was open for discussion in the interviews, but my main focus was on alphabetic text written in English for another human reader, so text written for foreign language classes (Anna and Kendra) or computer coding (Zarina and Carter) did not receive the same analytical consideration.

each interview on its own. In the third iteration in summer 2016, I first read and annotated each new interview (including the group interview) on its own, and then re-read and coded all three (or four) interviews for each participant in one sitting in order to gain a sense of changes across time within each student's experience. From these multiple passes, I established preliminary codes on all student interviews.

This iterative process allowed me to write brief developmental sketches for each participant, which I then compared across cases to select the broad codes (*independence, reading and writing, audience, advocacy,* and *disciplinarity*), that provided the most explanatory power within each case and across the cases (Stake, 2006). Each of these codes was inspired by a particularly insightful comment by a participant in the last round of interviews, and I used these concepts to re-evaluate all the data and create preliminary themes, looking for confirmation or disconfirmation along the way and tagging all references to these broad concepts. In order to create the individual profiles that will begin Chapter 4, I also coded for *attitudes toward writing*, *references to process*, *statements of ease and difficulty,* and *perception of school culture*.

I then created separate analytical documents that grouped the coded pieces of data to facilitate cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) through more focused coding for associated concepts within the broad topical codes, leading to the creation of the themes that form the basis of the findings of the project:

- Overall, students were successful in their transitions, but their *experiences were diverse* and highly situated
- Students offered contradicting claims of *becoming more independent*
- Students' writing processes were shaped by the *demands of college reading*
- A main source of struggle and growth was learning to *write in new disciplines*
- Students were uncomfortable interacting with and *writing for new audiences*
- Students found themselves drawing on non-school based resources to *write for self-advocacy*

Though these themes provide answers to the research questions that drove the inquiry of this project, they do not map directly to the questions in a one-to-one fashion. Table 3 below explains the connection between the findings and questions for the project.

Table 3. Relationship between research questions (vertical) and key findings (horizontal)

	Varied transition	Independence	Reading/ Writing	Disciplines	Audience	Advocacy
RQ1 Become college writer	X	X	X	X	X	X
RQ2 Process change	X	X	X			
RQ3 Helpful and unhelpful	X	X		X	X	
RQ4 Life narrative				X		X

I shared these initial findings, as well as a general sense of how each individual participant would be represented within each, with the participants via email as a means of preliminary member-checking (Stake, 2006). The email offered an opportunity for response, including clarification and addition of related writing, stories, or situations. I did not hear back from participants after two mailings.

Role of Researcher

Stake (1994) cautions that "case researchers, as others, pass along to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationships—and fail to pass along others" (pp. 240-241). Cognizant of the inability of a researcher to separate him or herself

completely from the phenomena under study, I will use this section to explain potential conflicts in my role as researcher and how I limited them.

First, I conducted this research from within the in the school at which I teach. While doing so gave me the benefit of access to students, it also made it difficult for participants to separate my persona as *teacher* who has a perceived set of interests in the way students within the school should think and behave and my persona as *researcher* whose goal is not to impose any certain norms, values, or practices. I worked to mitigate this complication by inviting only those students who had never been in a class I have taught to participate. This choice eliminated approximately 25 students from the current senior class whom I had taught in a ninth-grade English class three years before, leaving approximately 275 other students to select from. I was also not part of the school faculty for the two years between this group's ninth- and twelfth-grade year, helping to establish me more as a stranger than a known teacher.

This absence, though, is at once an advantage and a liability. In my two-year absence from the school, I served as the district's ELA curriculum coordinator, where I exerted a degree of influence on what and how students are taught. My approach to all of this exertion of influence was, from my point of view, collaborative and teacher centered, but it was also significantly informed by the very pointed charge from multiple administrators to "implement the Common Core State Standards." While this study did not attempt to evaluate the curriculum or instruction of the particular institution of the high school, students' responses to it did require some degree of interpretation of what they were taught and how well that teaching prepared them. I made a purposeful effort to

ask teachers and students for clarification of their experiences in the school curriculum, not letting my insider knowledge serve as a bridge (possibly too far) to inference.

I saw signs of tension over my role as teacher when students would want to make a comment critical of a particular teacher or teaching practice in the school. They would often stop and ask questions such as, "Can I use names?" or make statements such as "I understand why a code name is important now." In these cases, I assured them of the privacy their data would be afforded as part of the project. On the other hand, I saw signs of students feeling comfortable with the interviewer-interviewee relationship when they would share with me stories of institutionally frowned upon practices, such as not completing readings or finishing written assignments early in the morning, just before they were due.

Combining data collection through one-on-one interviews and the group interview also helped mitigate my role, as evidenced by the completely new thread of conversation that came up in the new setting of the group interview. While several students had made comments about how their racial or ethnic backgrounds mattered in their lives and educations over the course of the interviews, none of those comments compared to the richness of the commentary that came out once Zarina pointed out that she had trouble adjusting to her department's competitive culture. The follow-up comments from D'Metra and Kendra about feelings of racial isolation on their campuses were facilitated, from my point of view, by the participant-centered nature of the conversation and presence of an immediately supportive peer audience, rather than just the researcher.

I experienced role confusion in the interview with Calvin in which he shared that he had dropped out of college and was on the brink of homelessness. When he offered to

write his appeal letter with me instead of continuing with the interview since he had so little school experience to discuss, I was concerned that I was potentially taking advantage of his situation, but I reasoned that his story provided an important contribution to the college readiness narrative about circumstances well beyond academic preparation. We also took 30 minutes of the allotted interview time to debrief on the details of his situation and his plan for the future. I helped him research insurance options and sources of support at his institution, and made sure he knew that I was someone he could call upon if he had a particular need. I met with him again in the summer to continue to working on his financial aid appeal letter. I also followed up with a teacher who he mentioned had been helping him with guidance and financial assistance.

While I cannot be certain whether or how students' participation in the study changed their first-year college experiences, I do have evidence that some participants found value in the time and space provided to reflect on their writing. Kendra, for example, remarked during the initial think-aloud that she had never thought of her approach to writing in specific strategic terms until she was asked to explain what she was doing as she was doing it. Zarina noted at the end of the year that through her attempts to describe the function of each lab report to me (a less-than-novice chemist), she realized the specific conceptual progression the focus of the labs represented.

Last, regardless of my efforts to separate my researcher role from my specifically situated role as employee in these particular settings, I remained aware of my more general stance as a writing teacher and student of sociocultural views toward literacy acquisition and practice. Because my goal was to present students' points of view on their transitions, I worked to make sure I was presenting the most important issues that

students themselves called attention to. I did not expect, for example, to report on the extent to which students chose not to complete reading assignments as part of their college transition. But because it was a central concern to nearly all of the cases, I attended to it to reflect the perspectives of the participants.

Contribution

The primary contribution this project makes to the field and society is to help to continue to develop an understanding of college readiness that embodies a sociocultural view of writing and therefore views preparation as a process that perhaps involves standards, assessments, and notions of individual effort, but that is certainly broader and more complex than any of those factors. This contribution comes, in part, as a result of my participants and data collection plan. Nearly all of the college readiness studies—or any studies of college writing—take as their starting point the beginning of the students' college careers. This project extends that view by one semester.

Such an extension may seem insignificant, but given the lack of research that positions participants as both high school students and college students (Harklau, 2001), there is the potential for new understandings of the transition to college—ones that rely perhaps less on memory to construct the high school writing experience and may tend less to frame the transition to college as the rejection of what was learned in high school. Furthermore, the chronological extension by one semester was complemented by a longer longitudinal view afforded by life history interviews from family members.

More specifically, this project responds to calls from their field from authors such as Carter, Locks, and Winkle-Wagner (2013) who cite the specific need for additional research into the "critical concerns regarding the college transition for people of color"

(p. 94) and Beach, Newell, and VanDerHeide (2015) who point out that much of our understanding of writing development "derives from studies of studies of white mainstream students" (p. 95). They call identify the need for research that examines "how students from a range of social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds benefit from changes in social practices for learning to write in a range of different contexts" (p. 95). So, while all the students come from the same secondary institution, the demographic diversity of the participants and the diversity of their choices of post-secondary institutions offer much needed perspectives to the field's understanding of the transition.

Last, I hope this project might contribute to a conversation around college readiness that puts students more at the center and that frames the high school to college transition as one that belongs to the students, not simply to the institutions and policymakers on both sides of the temporal divide. Adding a stronger sense of the students' voice to what it means to grow as a thinker and writer from high school to college has the potential to serve students better as they make the transition.

CHAPTER 4

THE VARIED NATURE OF THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE WRITING

This chapter will begin with a mini-case study presentation of each of the eight participants, designed to introduce them more specifically than in the demographics provided in the methods section, to set the groundwork for thematic examinations in this and later chapters, and to acknowledge meaningful aspects of their individual transitions that do not necessarily become the focus of those thematic examinations. Following these presentations on the individuals, I will turn to the first thematic cross-case discussion, an exploration of the common claim across participants that a significant aspect of their transition was becoming more independent as thinkers and writers.

Presentation of Individual Case Studies

Through the mini-case studies, I will demonstrate the widely varied experiences students encountered in their transitions from high school to college, underscoring that for all of the challenges they faced, they described their transition to college writing as successful, and their grades and other feedback on writing overwhelmingly supported that claim. In other words, while each student represents a different notion of what a successful first-year writer can be, he or she also represents a unique, unpredictable path toward that success. The exception of Calvin, whose circumstantially troubled case is an example of Duncheon and Tierney's (2014) claim that the preponderance of college failures are due to non-cognitive factors, will begin the discussion.

The remaining profiles will include attention to noteworthy aspects of difference among the students in high school, including their varying attitudes toward writing (Yancey, 2015), their varying levels of process awareness and metacognition (Tinberg,

2015), as well as differing experiences in writing through the school curricula (Applebee & Langer, 2013). I will then summarize their academic paths from high school through their first year of college (including, where applicable, students' assessments of the school cultures in which they were immersed) before turning to some key changes they saw in their writing, in their composing processes, and in themselves. In each profile, I will describe the amount and type of writing students did across their transition, all of which is summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Overview of writing completed by each student, by semester.
Tot=total pieces and pages, Ave=average length of piece, Longest paper in the semester, Number of classes in which writing was required.

	Spring 15	Fall 15	Winter 15	Spring 16
Anna	tot: 11 pieces/ 30.25pp, ave: 2.75pp longest: 6.5pp 2 classes	tot: 14 pieces/ 46.75 pp ave: 3.33pp longest: 7pp 2 classes	tot: 13 pieces/ 49.5pp ave: 3.75pp longest: 8pp 3 classes	Total: 12 pieces/ 49pp ave: 4 pp longest: 6.5pp 3 classes
Calvin	tot: 17 pieces/ 45.25pp ave: 2.6 pp longest: 5 2 classes	tot: 8 pieces/ 18pp, ave: 2.25 pp longest: 5 2 classes	N/A	No writing completed; withdrew
Carter	tot: 35 pieces/ 95.25pp ave: 2.75 pp longest: 7 3 classes	No writing assigned	N/A	tot: 13 pieces/ 29.5pp ave: 2.25pp longest: 4pp 2 classes
D'Metra	tot: 25 pieces/ 49pp ave: 2pp longest: 5pp 1 class	tot: 28 pieces/ 52.5pp ave: 1.9pp longest: 5 4 classes	N/A	tot: 7 pieces/ 22.5pp ave: 3.25pp longest: 5.5pp 3 classes
Elijah	tot: 2 pieces/ 2.25pp ave: 1p longest: 1.25p 1 class	tot: 18 pieces/ 36.5pp ave: 2pp longest: 4 2 classes	N/A	tot: 11 pieces/ 25.5pp ave: 2.5pp longest: 4pp 3 classes

Table 4, cont.				
	Spring 15	Fall 15	Winter 15	Spring 16
Kendra	tot: 19 pieces/ 38.75pp ave: 2pp longest: 5.5pp 4 classes	tot: 24 pieces/ 67.5pp ave: 2.75pp longest: 6.5 4 classes	tot: 20 pieces/ 33.5pages ave: 1.67pp longest: 4pp 3 classes	tot: 23 pieces/ 40pp ave: 1.75pp longest: 6pp 3 classes
Valorous	tot: 3 pieces/ 16pp ave: 5.33pp longest: 10pp 1 class	tot: 4 pieces/ 15pp ave: 3.5pp longest: 5pp 1 class	N/A	tot: 6 pieces/ 23pp ave: 3.75pp longest: 12pp 2 classes
Zarina	tot: 6 pieces/ 21.75 pp ave: 3.75pp longest: 10.25 1 class	tot: 11 pieces/ 69 pp ave: 6.25pp longest: 14 2 classes	N/A	tot: 11 pieces/ 60 pp ave: 5.5pp longest: 20pp 3 classes

Calvin: Working Hard, Dropping Out

Background as a student and writer in high school. When I first talked to Calvin in his last semester of high school, he had recently moved from Advanced Placement English to honors rhetoric (a move "down" in tracks), a decision brought on, in part, by his preference for writing "opinionated pieces" in which he could "freewrite...about anything [he] want[s]" and his distaste for "specifics when it comes to writing." He pointed out that he "didn't get the best grades" in high school, but he felt that his accomplishments in extra-curricular activities compensated, making him "more prepared to like grow up and get things done and actually make a change, [rather] than sitting inside a classroom and just you know, putting [his] thoughts on paper." He displayed a passion for creative writing and pointed out how he had taken multiple school assignments calling for a standard academic response and transformed them into opportunities to display his creativity. One such case was when he was asked to write

about the Laws of Motion in a science class, he wrote a fictional piece about a female character learning and responding to the "Laws of Love" analogous to Newton's laws. In his second semester of high school, he wrote around 45 pages across 17 pieces, most of them for his rhetoric class portfolio. He also shared sections of short stories he was writing in a new journal.

In his initial think-aloud, he read the article through, making several comments that suggested his engagement with the content and then composed the following introductory text all at once:

> Students are expected to attend school five days a week. They are expected to get good grades, take hard courses, and eventually attend the best colleges. However, when does actually learning the material come into play? In Frank Bruni's article, he discusses this idea of censorship and expectations. He challenges the readers' perspective by saying the ideas of students who will never truly pass due to a society that is so consumed with passing. We must understand, though, that the best learning comes from living.

This extemporaneous prose revealed both Calvin's facility with academic language and tasks (he went on to explain plausibly how he would develop these ideas in a full essay) and the tension he felt about "doing academic tasks" as opposed to learning from "real life."

Outline of academic path from high school to college. Calvin's first semester of college was marked by an early highlight, as he was elected student body president of his junior college in part based on a candidacy letter that he wrote for publication in the student newspaper. His test scores also placed him into the honors version of first-year

composition, an accelerated one-semester version of the course most students at the college take over two semesters.

In his fall interview, Calvin shared writing he had done for a theater appreciation class and a few other assignments, including a partially completed research paper on 1980s popular culture. The main focus of our conversation, though, was about how "rough" he had found the transition, due in large part to his need to work multiple jobs because he had been required to move out of a relative's home immediately after high school graduation. He also cited as factors in the difficulty of the transition his choice to participate in a play early in the fall and his decision to "give up" on classes he did not feel "passionate" about, including the composition class. He did not receive credit for his composition class, despite his reflection that he had felt

> prepared for a lot of it, but I just feel like I didn't apply myself as much as I should have. Like I feel like I had the tools to do it, and that I had like, I feel like I had been taught how to do it and how to work the load, but I just didn't adjust when I should have.

He received credit for only one course in the first semester, and he knew that next semester would need to be "strictly academic," as he worried that he would find himself "in the position of not having financial aid, you know being homeless [nervous laughter] and different things like that that are going to be like really tough to deal with." While he mentioned his goal to focus strictly on academics, he also immediately noted the need to maximize his work schedule to provide money for housing and food, as financial aid (already in jeopardy) covered only school-related fees.

As I will share in a later chapter, Calvin's situation worsened in his second semester, and when we met in the spring, he had withdrawn from college altogether with the hope of re-enrolling the next school year.

Elijah: Gaining a Process Strategy

Background as a student and writer in high school. Of all the students in the project, Elijah wrote the least in his final semester of high school. Because he took a regular-track literature course that semester rather than a rhetoric class (which he had taken in the fall), he wrote just 2.25 pages: a short analysis of a scene from *Hamlet* and a thematic analysis of a poem. He characterized himself as "not much of a writer," explaining further that he was "not like the kind of person who just like basically makes time to just write about stuff" but that he did his assignments, worked to get good grades, and would "sometimes enjoy writing stuff."

In both the interview and think-aloud, Elijah exhibited less sense of awareness of his writing process than did the other participants in the study. He explained that he "basically just think[s] about it like in [his] head" and then types; he would ask questions of the teacher unless he was feeling "just kinda lazy and [doesn't] really want to do an assignment," in which case he would typically move ahead with his best understanding of the task. When asked to explain the story or process behind various papers he brought to our interviews, he summarized their content rather than discussing how he wrote them. Similarly, in the initial think-aloud, he focused more on re-telling the content of the article than explaining how he would write about it. As I probed for specifics about how he would transform some of the ideas he talked about into writing, he said " I write better when it's like the last minute, because...I don't know, basically I would just concentrate

and be like ‘Ok, I need to finish this,’ so I'm just gonna have all my thoughts and be like ‘OK I need to do this now.’”

Outline of academic path from high school to college. As I will address more thoroughly in a later chapter, Elijah placed into the non-credit bearing developmental track of composition in his first year at the local junior college. In his first semester, he wrote 36 pages across 18 pieces, many of them process-based pieces leading up to longer essays in developmental English. Many of these pieces were around a page and served to scaffold thinking and writing practices, as well as comprehension of texts, that then transferred into essays around four pages long. In his second semester, he wrote around 25 pages, including some shorter pieces for his critical comprehension class and longer essays (up to six pages) in his First-Year Composition 1 class. By the end of the year, he had decided to major in business, a change from his initial plan to potentially major in chiropractic medicine. He noted that one way that his transition to college was made smoother was his identity as a college athlete, with his soccer team giving him a ready-established group of friends (including some from high school), though the time commitment for games and practices made the first semester, in particular, more challenging.

Overview of writing development across the year. Although there are questions about how Elijah was placed into developmental composition, he acknowledged the experience was beneficial for him, and more than any other student in the study, his interview and think-aloud after his first year of college suggested a significant change in terms of awareness and control over his process. He explained that

> writing literally makes more sense than what I was used to cause you know in high school, I was just like writing things, I didn't even know if I was even in the same like point when I started in the beginning of a body paragraph.

He credited the journals from his developmental writing class, which required him to think about aspects of a larger paper and consider how his point of view would be related to a source (provided by the teacher at first) using the mnemonic P-I-E (for Point-Information-Explanation) paragraph. He acknowledged that in high school he "did [this], kind of" but "in college, they added the terms like 'insert,' 'quote,' and 'explain'" that helped him understand what he was doing. "In high school," Elijah reflected, "I would probably talk about stuff, but there probably was not much of an organization, but like in college I basically care more how I kinda organize my papers...I would have like a P-I-E paragraph, have an insert, like quotes, and all that stuff. Back in high school, I didn't care that much about that. I just write."

He also reflected that in high school he always "would start like first: introduction. And then go down, all the way down" which caused him to "always get stuck," but the journaling in developmental composition helped him realize that his thesis could develop from the ideas he knew he was going to write about later. In his words, "starting off with my body paragraphs and all that stuff...was easy because I would write it down and *then* do the introduction...starting with how I'm gonna approach it, and then when I come to the thesis it's gonna be easier cause I already have all the paper." He found these techniques reinforced in other classes, as his credit-bearing First-Year Composition 1 teacher "forbade" him from starting with his introduction and acknowledged the PIE paragraph as an effective way to give structure to his thinking.

In the second think-aloud, Elijah displayed evidence of transfer of practices from his first-year coursework to a new task, as he looked for the thesis of the article first "just like I was doing these kinds of things in critical comprehension," a non-credit bearing reading class, in order to "pick like points, kinda like some big point of like the article and make like, divide it into like two or three paragraphs." So, while his account of process was still not totally lucid, it had certainly moved beyond the vague, elusive language of his first think-aloud and represented a change in his writing practice that he viewed as significant.

Carter: College Writing is More Than "Performing Structure"

Background as a student and writer in high school. In our initial interview, Carter explained that he had "never gotten very good grades" because until recently he "didn't fully understand what the point of school was." In his senior year, though, he had discovered the "really simple" truth for him that he was able to do well academically if he was interested in it or if he could find a way to be interested in it. He explained that he "only really did writing assignments because they were absolutely necessary" and "most of the time...it was just filler," or put another way, he was "putting things down because [he] had to." His mother explained that he never had academic difficulty in school, but noted at multiple points in our conversation that with "all the cliques and the kids, he doesn't make friends very easily" and the "it's mostly been the social things that have been more difficult for him." In his senior year, he sometimes saw writing as a way to negotiate the social landscape of the school, writing a creative piece for the school literary magazine because he was "eager to display [his] literary talents to [his] classmates." His mom separately noted this role of composing in Carter's life, recalling

that as cartoonist for the newspaper "he gets a little more respect from his peers, and so that...helps him a little bit because they look up to him a little bit more."

In his initial think-aloud, he displayed a significant awareness of his approach to the task, noting first that a "*response* [the requested genre] is just like a miniature essay isn't it?" He also read actively for evidence and relied on his sense of what school-based writing should look and sound like to draft a document, making comments such as "out of all the essays that I wrote in the past...there always has to be a starting sentence, a kind of sentence that goes into detail," "Well, I can just list examples and say why those examples are good," and "There's always a quote" to indicate his sense of strategy he wrote. Even though his approach in the think-aloud seemed relatively rule-based, he explained that as he transitioned from middle school to high school, he found that he took "a lot of chances," noting that in earlier grades written assignments had to be done "as uniformly as possibly or you don't get a good grade," but in late high school, expectations seemed "a little more lax."

Of all the students in the study, Carter wrote the most (almost 100 pages) in the second semester of his senior year, mostly because he was taking three English classes at once. He wrote five pieces for the newspaper, five pieces for creative writing, and 24 pieces for his senior honors rhetoric class. Carter explained that the volume of his portfolio, which contained pieces ranging in length from a page to six pages and in content/style from poetry to narrative accounts to expository reflections, helped him see "all the talent [he] had in [his] writing," but he conceded that he had "already known all the stuff [he] could do, [he] just had to keep doing it" until he had the required amount and variety of writing. Many of the pieces in the portfolio were personal and informal in

nature, and at the end of his initial think-aloud, Carter volunteered that analyzing the argument of another author "wouldn't be an actual school assignment" because compared to the writing he had been doing "this seems like a really complicated thing...I've always had a lot simpler assignments," but he felt he would be able to transfer some of that "basic knowledge" to a task like that one.

Outline of academic path from high school to college. Carter attended the nearby junior college to study graphic design, and in his first semester, he was not asked to do any formal writing. He took art, graphic design, and digital media classes and wrote code to design a video game, though he did not consider code "as writing as much as it is just telling the computer what to do." He explained that he used writing informally to plan his digital projects, noting that jotting down his plans "makes it easier on [him] to kind of think, to step outside the box" and that having ideas written down "eases the tension for when you're actually creating things" to focus on craft and refining ideas through the process. Despite his claim that writing code was not writing, he acknowledged that there was significant overlap in the way he approached these design projects and the way he approaches writing in terms of planning and focusing on structure as a key element.

In his second semester, Carter wrote around 30 pages, including short responses and a research paper in a film class and three essays in a First-Year Composition 1 class in which "we would take popular issues or issues that were popular a couple years ago and just, you know, write papers about them." Carter's comments about his college culture were infrequent and neutral, mostly consisting of his observation that it was the same as high school, only bigger.

Overview of writing development across the year. Carter described his development both in terms of changes in textual features and his views toward writing. He explained that he did not feel he learned very much in his First-Year Composition 1 class because, as he saw it, the teacher pointed out what "we were good or bad at" and students would improve, but "luckily for [him,]...[he] didn't have very many flaws." He explained that one specific strategy he learned was to include a concession paragraph in his argumentative writing, something he did not recall being required to do in high school. Echoing his experience in transitioning from middle school, Carter noted that college writing seemed more free and open, clarifying that in high school, teachers might tell him the structure or content of each paragraph and give him the sources he needed to use in a paper, a teaching practice confirmed by Mr. Braun later in this chapter. In other words, he saw the "the main difference between high school and college essays...is the structure is set and you just have to make sure that you perform the structure of it well. The college essay is—the structure and stuff is all up to you, and most of the difficulty and the challenge comes from making it sound good."

He also began to imagine his school-based writing in college as part of a larger conversation about the topics he wrote about, a somewhat more abstract version of the social function he already saw for writing in high school. He noted that "I don't know, if anyone would be like [in a mock serious voice] 'Based off of Carter Ellis' piece...' Something like that, but what I'm saying is … with high school classes it was always 'This this and this,' and that's it." Because he saw more of his point of view and craft embedded in written pieces in college and because he felt that "the topics...of papers [in college] were a lot more adult than what we wrote in high school," he could imagine

people responding to his writing through their own writing in a way that he had not considered before.

Valorous: Writing Has to "Mean Something"

Background as student and writer in high school. Valorous was the only student in the study enrolled in dual credit English in high school, a course designed to give students access to college curriculum and credit during their senior year. Although she completed the class (writing three papers totaling about 16 pages), she did not earn a high enough grade to earn college credit, largely because of missed deadlines associated with challenging experiences her senior year. She referred to this time as "going off the deep end" and being "kinda tired of it all," a circumstance that her father corroborated when he shared that in "January or February, she dropped the ball and just stopped doing" which required her to "cram a lot of stuff in from maybe about April till she graduated." This "cram" was facilitated in part by a conference with her father and all of Valorous' teachers (organized by her AVID teacher Ms. Banner).

Valorous explained that this circumstance was unique in her K-12 experience noting that in "past years [she] was a good student," but she also contended that she has "never been a good writer," explaining more specifically that she believed that her peers' writing styles had become more sophisticated through high school while hers was "kinda staying like elementary, so it's like mediocre." She underscored her lack of confidence in her writing by noting that she did not "usually say or do things if [she] thinks they're gonna be wrong, so [she] just [says] nothing at all." This behavior was evident in her initial think-aloud (discussed more fully later in this chapter) when she found herself unable to begin writing after reading the article, claiming that in order to write about a

text, she would need to be able to consult with someone to be sure her interpretation was right. Despite my reassurances that the ideas she developed were strong, the think-aloud session ended in her crying out of frustration and disappointment.

Outline of academic path from high school to college. In high school, Valorous planned to become a sports trainer, noting that she had been admitted to that program at her junior college but she was not sure what being in that major meant or would entail for her. In her first semester of college, she wrote in three classes: First-Year Composition 1, in which she wrote four essays including a literacy narrative (which she explained she mostly made up to make it sound better) and three source-based essays; a first-year experience class (a speech on a career and a reflection paper), and math (weekly short reflections). In her second semester, she wrote in First-Year Composition 2, the second required composition class (she took the section on technical writing rather than the traditional research writing class because it sounded easier and more interesting), an introductory education class, and a weather class. She explained that the writing required in the weather class made her "feel like [she] was in 5th grade again" because of the strict structure and requirements, and that all in all she was disappointed that she "thought this year going into college would be like, 'You're going to be a perfect writer after this,' but it didn't really turn out that way." Her comment was aimed particularly at her First-Year Composition 1 class, but she also felt that "it's [her] fault [because she] should have tried harder than [she] did."

Overview of writing development across the year. In her first-year experience class, Valorous heard another student give a speech on elementary education which sparked her interest enough to take the introductory education class second semester *and*

to write about the early childhood education major for her research project in First-Year Composition 2. She explained that this project helped her understand how important it is for writing to "mean something" to her. She went on to contrast the experience of writing about her new major to writing she did in first semester, saying of the career research paper:

> Of course because that's what I want to go into, it was important, so I had to take time to find all this information cause it wasn't just for the class, it was also benefitting me in the long run and writing about Barbie [a critique of the invention report from First-Year Composition 1] wasn't going to help anything, so it was just annoying.

Though she was proud of the work, Valorous did not romanticize the process involved in writing that research paper, and admitted that she frequently got behind schedule and skipped classes in the spring. But she noted that it was a different writing experience for her because "when it got toward the time to turn it in, [she] really took the time, like [she] never used to revise anything...but this time [she] like printed it out and [she] actually did some, [she] did a lot editing on this one. … [she] realized [she] should have been doing that the whole time with everything else."

Overall, Valorous took a tempered view on what her first year of college meant for her as a writer. "I still feel like I'm not a good writer," she explained, "but I feel like in a section of letters and complaints and memos [the specific focus of her second composition class], I know how to do those, I'm stronger in that section of writing." This glimmer of confidence was evident in her second think-aloud, in which she read and thought through the article and developed a plan for responding.

D'Metra: A Stable Sense of Process

Background as student and writer in high school. D'Metra described herself in high school as a "pretty good student," but her mother suggested a more effusive view, explaining that D'Metra "you know, try more and go further with the answer" than other students, and labeled her as a "critical thinker" who can "rise to any occasion when she writes." To illustrate, she told the story of family report card time from when D'Metra was in 3rd or 4th grade when one of D'Metra's siblings brought home unacceptable grades. She sat all her children around the kitchen table with their report cards and the sibling in question explained that "'*C*'s mean you where you supposed to be.'" Before D'Metra's mother could "get the words out of [her] mouth…[D'Metra] was like 'Well, not in this house! A *C* stands for "Coulda did better!"'" She described D'Metra as passionate (particularly about people), explaining that "she would gravitate more toward standing up for somebody's rights, opposed to standing up on somebody's stage," though she noted she is a fine singer as well.

D'Metra exhibited a high degree of awareness and control over her writing process, explaining that she has to "be in a good mood to write" and that many times in English class she "just [sat] there because nothing is really on [her] mind." She did not let this worry her, though, and referred to this time as "marinating." As she discussed her typical writing process, she offered examples such as this:

> Well, I wrote a thesis and then I was just like "Does this really make sense for my thesis?" and every time I said "No," I was like "Sorry, you're off the list." So um it was just a lot of just kind of "Ok, D'Metra, is this really constructive to the paper or is this just additional information?"

In her initial think-aloud, she exhibited similar meta-language on this very topic, noting that "now I think I'm getting better at you know like trying to do that on my own and say 'Well, is this you know really what I want to say or is it just something I want to add?' And if I really want to say it, but it don't really match, I try to find a way to put it in there, like the conclusion. You can put everything in your conclusion. [Laughs.]" She also explained that as a writer, she appreciated clear expectations for assignments, which she referred to as "boundaries" or "parameters," indicating her dislike for tasks that seem too broad or vague.

In her final semester of high school, D'Metra did all of her writing in her honors rhetoric class, writing around 50 pages over 25 pieces ranging from a one-page "Who am I?" poem to a six-page fictional grant proposal co-written with another student.

Outline of academic path from high school to college. D'Metra was clear on her goal for college: to become a high school history teacher. She took several history courses and wrote successfully in these classes (including two four-page essays in a course first semester and a six-page paper in another history course second semester). However, learning how to write these essays was not the primary challenge she faced in becoming a student of history. In the final group interview, D'Metra explained how the new college environment took an unexpected toll on her as a person and made her question her identity as a potential historian:

> Well, for me my hardest thing was as a black girl [was] we had a [history] department meeting, and I was literally the only black person, and I was like, "I can't. I can't," so I called Valorous and I was crying, and I was like, I just wanna go back home cause I don't feel comfortable.

She explained that she had had these feelings of racial isolation before in high school, but felt unprepared to experience them again in this new context, where she hoped to find more diversity and openness. Instead, she found herself fearing that her classmates were judging that her admission was based on Affirmative Action, which she found "very insulting cause [she is] very smart and...worked hard" to get to college, and felt "uncomfortable asking for help" just because of who she is.

Despite these feelings, over the course of her first year, D'Metra wrote around 52 pages her first semester and around 23 pages her second semester, a drop off that she found disappointing in terms of her perceived sense of rigor of her school and major. In her first semester, she took a first-year composition class that offered a genre study approach, and while she agreed that she learned a great deal from it, she did not think that she had to do all that specific work in order to learn it. In addition to the history content course first semester, she took a course designed to introduce her to the discipline of history in which she wrote several papers and reflections. She also wrote in a first-year transition course, including writing designed to orient her to the university, such as reviews of events and a write-up of an interview with a professor. In her second semester, she wrote several highly templated speeches, an extra credit assignment for biology, and a troublesome paper for a history class that will become the focus of discussion in Chapter 5.

Overview of writing development across the year. Reflecting on changes in her writing process at the end of her first year of college, D'Metra contended that she "honestly doesn't think is that different." She went on to say that she "still [does] the same things….get a feel for what [she is] supposed to be writing about … and then [she]

just goes for it, procrastinate[s] a bit, freak[s] out a little bit, then continue[s] to push through." She noted that rather than writing almost every day as she did in high school, often times over lunch in the company of and with the support of Ms. Banner, in college she had "what [she likes] to consider *writing days*" because of the more open and flexible schedule in college.

She did not feel particularly challenged by the writing she had to do in college, calling into question specifically the volume of writing and the significant amount of scaffolding that accompanied some of it. Although she explained how much she appreciated borders, or assignment expectations, in high school, she felt the writing she did in her speech class (which constituted the bulk of the writing she did for second semester) simply required her to "follow the outlines and just like insert your own ideas" and did not seem, from her point of view, like an appropriately challenging kind of writing.

Kendra: From Pre-Med to English

Background as student and writer in high school. Kendra explained that her high school writing experience was shaped by the tight constraints available for writing time, not because of the overwhelming amount of writing (she wrote around 40 pages spread over 19 pieces in 4 different classes), but because of the number of different activities she participated in. She recalled the writing process for an essay in AP English, noting that she was in a musical and was "backstage trying to write this essay," but did not have the book of poems she needed to complete the task. She "used a friend's Barnes and Noble account" to access the texts and recalled the experience as "very stressful at times, it was funny."

Kendra's awareness of her own writing habits and processes was evident when she shared that she resented when teachers forced an element of the writing process on her, particularly writing outlines that had to be turned in as part of the assignment. This is not to say that she did not find outlines useful. In fact, the process that she found worked best for her included making "one sentence that explains the first points [and then] little bullet points with each of the subpoints … then when [she's] writing the essay, [she] can have it right next to [her] laptop" and write from there. This process was confirmed in the think-aloud. Kendra explained that she valued writing for the depth of understanding it brought to her, explaining that "it's more likely to stick in your brain because you've written so much about it and you've spent so much time over that topic."

Interestingly, she had her introduction to college writing when she was a middle school student. Although her mother's account of their writing partnership differed from hers (her mother framed Kendra as more of a responder; Kendra recalled actually writing the first drafts of her mother's assignments), Kendra explained that when her mother was working on her degree in occupational therapy, she would read the assignments and co-write with her mom. She explained that she "had a better time writing [her] mom's papers that [she] did [her] own...Just like how quickly the ideas came to [her] about [the] papers," which she attributed to the requirement to "think harder about [her] mom's articles, cause this was like smart talk...instead of having to write a book report about a seventh grade book."

Outline of academic path from high school to college. This early exposure to college-level writing assignments did not assure a smooth transition for Kendra, though, largely because of her initial choice of major and her institution's trimester system. She

had begun the academic year as biology/pre-med and was taking both a biology and chemistry class, each requiring a lab report per week, which proved too difficult for her to keep up with. She explained to her peers in the final group interview that "chemistry re-introduced itself in the worst way possible. It like pimp slapped me!" She eventually dropped the chemistry class and changed her major to English. In that first trimester, she wrote 67 pages across 24 pieces. In her next trimester as an English major, she wrote 33.5 pages across 20 pieces (including several short assignments for two introductory English classes), and in the third trimester about 40 pages across 23 pieces.

Kendra's transition experience was unique in the study because of her sustained engagement with her university's writing center for feedback and assistance on her writing. Her first visit was prompted by a requirement in a first-year transition course, but she found herself going "once every two weeks. A lot. Six or seven times," but not for the most troublesome writing tasks in first trimester science, largely because she was unable to find the proper disciplinary expertise among the mentors at the writing center.

Despite the support she received in the writing center (as well as from other sources), Kendra shared in the end-of-year group interview that university "academic culture was a slap in the face, how alienating it is, how isolating the pressure there is." She went on to explain that, although her university has a reputation as a liberal campus, "people don't recognize how they aren't being what they preach." She offered the specific example of a time she presented a research paper on ways women of color respond to stress and oppression, and a white classmate asked her if she, as a biracial woman, had herself experienced these things. She interpreted this exchange as a challenge to the validity of her research that she did not hear being leveled toward other

(white) students. Like D'Metra, she pointed out that she had "experienced this...in high school" but was surprised to find people "unsympathetic to that magnitude" in college, and she wondered if in people's efforts to "redefine themselves and everything [in college], they lose some really humane parts of themselves."

Overview of writing development across the year. Kendra identified as an important aspect of her development that she "became an angrier person in [her] writing, or the topic," explaining that if she could find a way to take a political angle on a topic, she would do so. She also noted that she became a much more careful planner because of the time constraints of a ten-week schedule for each of her courses. Part of this planning included making "first drafts of everything" and "running them by the teacher." In her final trimester, she did this with "every single" essay. This led her to feel she "had to be guided a lot [in the final] quarter, which was a little weird."

Her planning, in other ways, became more flexible as she found that she would use outlines more often "the harder the assignment or the more invested in it," though she also admitted that this decision was sometimes about time, and she would occasionally launch into writing without an outline if she felt the deadline were too close. Overall, she felt at the end of her first year of college "more meta now," meaning that she edited and revised *as* she wrote, oftentimes hearing the specific writing advice from different professors in her head.

Zarina: Becoming a Writer in Chemistry

Background as a student and writer in high school. Zarina's approach to writing in high school might best be described as analytical. She explained that her "strongest pieces of writing" involved "explicating thoroughly and making sure [her]

points all connect and they're not all over the place." She held in high regard for writing that makes clear points and draws on data or evidence from multiple sources, a writing style that she became accustomed to in her AP English class. She displayed a high degree of awareness and facility with her writing process in that class, explaining that for a major poetry essay, in which she had to analyze "seven poems by the same poet and link them all together," she found "clumps, there were clusters" of ideas "running through the texts," which caused her to distinguish "the big thing" from "the clusters," noting the complication that "sometimes the clusters intermingle." To deal with this complexity, she numbered her ideas and made "like a graph basically of [her] poems" and visually represent the connections to help plan her writing.

Zarina also displayed significant awareness of the political power of writing as a high school senior, both in terms of using political topics as a resource for her writing (discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6) and through her out-of-school writing on Twitter. She saw an interconnection between the two kinds of writing, noting that

> it's easy for me to write things if I'm passionate about it, so if on Twitter something bad happens that I'm really into, I'll just have a lot of tweets being sent out because like this is important and I need to let you all know. So it's sort of the same in essays, like "This is how I feel, this is why it's important, this is why I'm telling you."

Zarina's belief that writing conveys personal conviction was so strong that it led to her to make a clear divide between the composing she did in AP English as "real writing" and the voluminous, serious lab reports she did in her first few semesters of college as "not really writing."

Outline of academic path from high school to college. The bulk of Zarina's writing in college was for her chemistry classes. She wrote for an Islamic cultures class in her second semester as well, the kind of writing she referred to as "real writing," but she expressed regret that because she had to devote so much time to work in other classes (among other factors) that she did not give that writing the amount of attention she wanted to. "Because of all of my science writing," she explained at the group interview, "I'm now like doing just very minimal amounts of writing." Despite this claim, she wrote 69 pages across 11 pieces in her first semester and 60 pages across 11 pieces in second semester. Many of these pieces were lab reports which were unusual in the study given their combination of alphabetic text, formulas and equations, and extensive charts and graphs.

She expressed somewhat contradictory points of view on the culture of her college environment, stating in her end-of-year interview that "women in STEM and especially women minorities in STEM is a really big deal," (because there are so few), but because she is in a more protected setting than the actual field, she had not "had much experience like being singled out," despite noticing that there are "like three girls in [her] class and everyone else is a boy." In the group interview, though, she called attention to the "competition in engineering culture [as being] kinda gross." She found it difficult to ask her help from peers as she learned to write lab reports "cause they're all trying to one up you, which, it's so wrong."

Overview of writing development across the year. Zarina noted that changes in her writing largely arose from differences in the tasks expected of her in college (chemistry lab reports as opposed to literature-based essays), but that for the most part,

the analytical strategies she used in high school served as a strong resource for her. As she reflected on how she wrote lab reports at the end of her first year, she explained that "the outline sort of process is very much what I did in high school. I would just literally pick through the pieces of evidence I needed...and I see myself doing that in my lab reports. I write down the data that I need and then, or like the data that is useful to me, and then I say why it's useful and how it led to my end result." Zarina's process of developing disciplinary understandings of what "data...is useful" and how it is encoded into a particular genre will be a focus of Chapter 5.

Anna: A Shifting Writer's Identity

Background as a student and writer in high school. In high school, Anna identified strongly as a writer, and she displayed a high awareness of her process and the strategies she used to enact it. To illustrate, she explained when she was a ninth grader, a teacher had told her "'You're not allowed to [underline the title of your writing] until you're a published author'" which made her feel like he was "undermining the value or the um the skill with which [she] wrote," and though she was a novice writer, she "always had a lot of pride in [her] writing skills and...when [she] was little [she] would you know win awards or whatever for like the writing, essay contests and things…[she] always thought of [her]self 'I'm a good writer, this is what I do: I write." Her mother confirmed this aspect of self-identification, explaining that "she's always loved school" and recalling that "she knew how to read in preschool" and "she likes to write."

In high school, Anna wrote almost daily as part of her work as editor of the newspaper staff, and in the second semester of her senior year, she wrote 11 pieces totaling just over 30 pages. Eight of those pieces were timed in-class essays written in

preparation for the AP English exam, all of which used the "standard five-paragraph [format]: introduction, three body, conclusion." In both the interview and first think-aloud, she shared that she would typically "think of like three, what are three things about this text that [she] can use to support [her] writing." "As a whole," Anna pointed out, "my writing skills are pretty strong. I feel like I, if you give me a prompt and ask me to write about it or do research and write about it, I can do that, I can get my ideas across well." She also considered herself "a little bit of a perfectionist but I'm kinda working on that [laughs] cause it made me a little crazy junior year."

Anna's awareness of her writing identity included the knowledge that her writing might improve if she were to take a different approach to her usual process. She explained that her process on longer assignments typically involved significant thinking and internal planning beforehand, but for her second-semester outside reading project (ORP), like other longer essays, she "actually wrote this one day, um [laughs] which is terrible and that's something I'm going to improve on this semester, hopefully." She acknowledged, though, that she rarely has trouble actually "finishing the writing, [she] can pump it out," yet she also believed that "something that would really improve my writing [is] if [she] gave [herself] more time to think about it … taking a day and saying, 'OK what is this saying to me, how does this affecting my thesis' … instead of just doing it all in one day."

Another limitation Anna noted about "who [she is] as a writer" was that she was quite closed to criticism. As she put it, "I don't know how I learned how I write, it's just a way that I write, and if I like it, I'm probably not gonna change it." In her first think-aloud, she explained, "Yeah, I don't actually really write first drafts, I really write final

drafts [Laughs]. I mean, that sounds awful but like I don't usually like do one thing and then scratch it and then write something else. Or like usually it's what I'm writing is like what I want."

Anna's comment should not be taken to mean that considered herself finished developing as a writer. On the contrary, she was very open in explaining that she was

> able to look at other people's writing, and take things that teachers tell me, or things that I heard on the radio...and add that to my, I guess you could say my toolbox, my repertoire of skills that I can use when I write.

She noted that one way that she has developed as a writer in high school came from changes in the tasks expected of her, notably a research paper that required her to take her "ideas and supporting them with other people's ideas...was something new for me that I hadn't done before, and I liked it because I could take, you know I'd have my idea and that was my idea and I would look at other people's work...you could think of another idea based off that."

Outline of academic path from high school to college. Like Kendra, Anna attended an institution on a trimester system. In her first trimester, she wrote 14 pieces totaling nearly 47 pages, ranging from a short reflection on using the library as part of an orientation course to a seven-page thesis-based, sourced argument on readings for a course on the history of early India. She cited the most significant writing of the trimester as papers for her communications course (a prerequisite for courses in her major), in which she applied communications concepts to real-life examples. In her second trimester, she wrote 13 pieces totaling nearly 50 pages, including argumentative and research essays for her introductory composition class, more papers applying course

content to real-life examples in a second communications class, and essays comparing and contrasting scholars in her comparative religion class as well as a longer synthesis paper for that class that will featured in a vignette in the second half of this chapter.

After the second trimester, she concluded she was not being sufficiently challenged in her major and made the decision to transfer to another school after her first year. In her third trimester, though, she wrote another 12 pieces totaling 49 pages including take-home exams from a philosophy course, a research paper for a political science class, and several reflective essays for a cultural communications class that focused on communication informed by "awakening ourselves to um to privilege and stuff like that, so we talked about race, we talked about sexual orientation, gender, I mean it was great."

Over the course of the year, she also wrote feature articles on members of her sorority for the organization's blog as well as short news stories for the campus radio station (with text drawn from a wire service), and she produced a short piece reporting on a campus visit from a political figure, which will be featured in the Chapter 5 on learning to write in disciplinary settings.

Like several other students, Anna made note of the role that the college environment had on her response to the transition, but her comments were largely positive. Despite feeling unsettled by no longer being "at the top of the pack" and wondering "what does that say about me," she explained that she appreciated

> Just being like in that environment of like people who are more or less invested in the same things as you are, interested in it, the professor really knows their shit … [and] a higher level of discussion, it makes you just put in more work and make

your point and not like gloss over things and your conclusion has to make sense and not be a blow off and so I think it's just being in the environment of like, a college, like yeah.

Overview of writing development across the year. Anna's transition to college was marked by plenty of institutionally- and self-defined success, in fact so much so that she eventually decided to leave her school for a lack of challenge. After her first trimester, she explained that she "had so much free time" compared to her schedule in high school, which allowed her to "expand" her process. In high school, her process was very compact and did not allow time for revision "mainly due to time restrictions and just the fact that all my assignments had kinda been the same." The unscheduled time in her college schedule gave her the freedom to return to a draft "with new eyes and say 'Okay, I can move this here and I can change this here….' So like I think with the expansion of the process, I don't feel like bad doing that, you know, I think in high school I would have seen that as 'This is so ridiculous,' like a weakness [but] I think it's actually a strength now."

Though Anna did not connect many specific aspects of her development as a writer to particular learning in classes, in her second think-aloud, she explained that the way she approached the racially sensitive task required her to be "acutely aware of like I am a white person, so like I really cannot speak with any authority about things that relate exclusively to the experience of people of color in this country," a relatively clear reference to the content of her intercultural communications class. When I asked her how she would acknowledge this complexity in writing, she said that it would depend on the context, but noted first that "in intercultural communication class, I'd be like, 'I'm a

woman, this is how I see it. I understand like I can't really speak with authority on any of this because my experience has been and will always be that of a white woman' so like I would acknowledge it," but perhaps not in a different class.

A final aspect of her development in process or approach to writing comes from a significant shift in practice regarding the degree of involvement of another reader or writer in her process, or the degree of independence with which she approaches a writing task. This is the topic to which I will turn later in this chapter.

Discussion of the Case Overviews

Generalizing about the transition from high school to college for student writers seems unwise given the diversity of experiences within even this small group. Their overview stories do, however, support a few key observations. First, the amount and type of writing expected of students in their first year varied widely not only by student and academic program, but also by semester (see Table 4 at the beginning of this chapter for a comparative summary). Some students wrote significantly more in college than they did in their last semester of high school, but certainly not all of them did. Generally, students wrote in more of their classes than they did in high school (where most of them wrote mostly, if not only, for English class), but typically they would have one or more classes per semester in college in which they did not write anything.

Furthermore, most pieces in students' first year were relatively short, with many writing assignments serving as starting points or complements to longer pieces that developed later in the semester. For many students, a five-page paper was the longest piece of a semester. Some students' writing processes changed significantly because of specific instruction; others because of changes in the time, space, and resources afforded

by the college environment; others seemed not to change much at all. Though I do not have enough information about each student's college context to make specific claims, it does seem that the size of the institution students attended related in some way to their transition experience. Zarina and D'Metra, the students who expressed the most concern about the feeling of distance between students and teachers (explored at length in Chapter 6), attended the largest institutions and had the most encounters with courses led by multiple instructors (that is, a professor and a teaching assistant or a lecturer and a grader).

Continuing the discussion of context, a notable contrast across participants was their response to their new college environment or culture, particularly in terms of their sense of belonging, in a sociocultural sense. Of the students who made explicit mention of the college environment (D'Metra, Zarina, and Kendra, all in the final group interview, and Anna in a previous individual interview), three racial/ethnic minority women called attention to a sense of feeling alone or under attack, with an acknowledgment that these feelings affected the way they saw themselves as students and writers. D'Metra and Kendra, in particular, had responses that resonate with the finding that "students of color attending [predominantly white institutions] tend to experience a lack of support from colleges and universities that specifically manifests itself as negative experiences with the racial climate that affect their academic, social, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment to college" (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013, p. 97). On the other hand, Anna, who is white, described the environment in explicitly positive terms, and through her think-aloud expressed having learned that there are times she needed to take into account through her writing the privileges afforded her by her identity.

Building from the approach taken by Welton and Martinez (2013), I will present and interpret students' responses to the structural challenges of being a minority student at a majority white institution through a lens of strength rather than deficit. Welton and Martinez (2013) found that students often responded to challenges such as being labeled with negative racial-cultural stereotypes by new and unfamiliar peers with "positive resources and cultural knowledge they draw upon to navigate their pathway to college" (p. 205). They found that some students, in fact, converted this fear and negativity into motivation to persevere. While I do not seek to minimize the impact of this aspect of the transition on students of color in the study or arbitrarily reframe challenges as motivations without evidence, I want to stress that these students found ways to continue pursuing their academic goals with a high degree of success in spite of challenges.

Another significant point of variance among students was the degree to which they found writing in college generally challenging. In their end-of-high school interviews, most students indicated that they expected significant challenges from college, both in terms of the academic load generally, and writing in particular. They expected to write more, in more classes, about more complex topics, with more rigorous standards. While this was the case for some of the students in the study (Kendra, Zarina, and Elijah consistently described the transition to college writing as challenging), two students, Anna and D'Metra, stand out as being particularly critical of their transition experience, noting how little challenge they experienced as writers in their first years.

Anna acknowledged being pleased at the volume of writing that had been required of her in her first year, but as mentioned earlier, she expressed a concern over the level of challenge that writing presented her. After her first trimester, for example, she noted with

some exasperation that "as a general trend, I haven't been super...I have yet to feel like, look at a writing assignment and be like, 'Oh man, like shit! Like I don't know how to do this.'" This trend continued into the second trimester, with Anna eventually realizing she was "not working as hard as [she] did in high school," and still wishing to get the kind of critical feedback on her writing that would spur the development she *thought* she would experience in college.

She had, in fact, been receiving very positive feedback on her work which she found "was probably dangerous cause that just reaffirmed [her beliefs she was a strong writer]...and the feedback was like 'Great job, this is so great!,' and that's great, it's nice to hear...but I want someone to be able to pick it apart and be like 'See where you did this? You could have done this?" Never receiving that level of challenge led her to decide by the spring term to apply for transfer to a different school, where she felt the rigor of the journalism program might be more what she expected.

D'Metra was similarly underwhelmed with her first-year writing experience in college. She referred to her first-year composition class, focused around genre study as "a joke," partly because it taught students to analyze "non-traditional" texts (e.g., posters, brochures, literary vignettes) in rather complex ways so they could understand new genres and produce them, but the writing she was doing in her other classes was much more traditionally academic, and thus already familiar to her. At the end of her first year, she reflected that she "was surprised by the lack of writing assignments," and within the assignments she did have, "the guidance of everything was surprising." "I thought it would be harder," she noted, "but it wasn't."

While Valorous did not offer an overall assessment as critical as Anna and D'Metra did, she offered the unique case of a student who had taken a first-year composition course designed for the same institution at both the high school level (where she did not receive a high enough grade to earn credit) and at the college level (where she did). After the first semester of the course, she explained that she "felt that class was kind, of honestly, … the [dual credit composition] class that I took [in high school] was more challenging than the class [in college]." She described the college-set version as "kind of kiddy-ish," referring to the topics such as a literacy narrative as an opportunity to "BS it like [she] did" and the paper on "the invention, there was just no point to it…. I thought it was going to be more advanced than it was."

So, even to say that a defining feature of the transition to college is that it is harder or will provide particularly new textual challenges to writers is not necessarily accurate, underscoring the personal and highly situated nature of what the process of "becoming a college writer" means for students. Building from this notion of variance around the individual experience, I will turn now to the frequent claim from participants that over the course of their first year post-high school, they became more independent as students, writers, and people.

Complex Declarations of Independence as College Writers

Students' assertions that they became more independent as an important aspect of development in the transition to college are supported by policy documents such as the Common Core Writing Standards (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010), which as noted in Chapter 2 make independence at least an *implicit* goal of development, as writers are expected to need less support from teachers or peers as they ascend the grade levels. Notably, the

CCSS also *explicitly* call for independence in its section entitled "Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Language," which the authors clarify are not standards themselves but are rather "a portrait of students who meet the standards set out in this document" (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 7). The first characteristic in the list is, in fact, *independence*.

The standards' explanation of the term begins simply, suggesting that students should be able to read challenging text "without scaffolding" and "independently," as well as to demonstrate effective vocabulary and well-edited language "without prompting" (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 7). Their description of independence becomes more complex in the final sentence, in which the standards call for students to "effectively [seek] out and [use] resources to assist them, including teachers, peers, and print and digital reference materials" (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010, p. 7). With the eventual focus on finding helpful others, this definition does not sound like *independence* at all. In fact, the term the document goes on to describe those who engage in such behaviors is *self-directed learners*, who may need to take independent initiative to seek out help, but who are not ultimately defined by independence in their actions.

The teachers to whom students referred me as influential in their writing lives held similarly complex views on the desire to instill independence in their students. Ms. Banner, who taught the AVID class in which Valorous and D'Metra were enrolled, explained, for example, that her main function for students is to be part of a "system of support" and to notice when students are "at their darkest hour when they have no confidence...and remind them like 'Here's what you've done before, so if you can do it before, you can do it now.'" While she felt pleased when she saw students functioning

with independence, she did not necessarily see that as a worthy end goal since being there for them and helping them when they ask was "a promise [she] made to them." She explained that she had mixed feelings about this promise, though, as she knows she cannot always be there for them and they will have to manage on their own.

Other teachers addressed independence from a more strictly academic standpoint. Mr. Braun, for example, explicitly noted that he wanted to develop "more independent writers...that's what needs to happen," particularly when it comes to editing before submitting. He worried that he was "probably breaking [assignment tasks] down much more" than what students would experience in college, as he assumed that students in college "get a prompt [and are told] 'Go!" Ms. Bradford explained that, based on her experience in college, students needed to be prepared for an "expectation of independence," which she clarified in a way very similar to the way the CCSS do:

> It wasn't that they didn't need peer editors, or they didn't need to talk to someone about their writing, but that they knew what they needed to ask. And they knew that they could find help…. I think too many times when people think *independent*, they think they don't need help from anybody, and that's just not true.

Ms. Streep echoed this belief, explaining that she believed a college-ready writer is able "to find resources" and seek out help on their own.

The portraits of students in transition that I offer below will suggest that they, too, hold complex notions of what they mean by independence, including the more straightforward definition of producing text on their own (though, as Roozen [2015a] points out, no one is ever truly doing so). But they also illustrate the somewhat more

socioculturally aligned notion of *self-direction* defined, in part, by participation in the university community in new ways by asking for and receiving help from others who are more familiar with certain practices, or who are willing to help another navigate unfamiliar textual and social terrains.

Valorous and D'Metra: Doing More on Their Own

In high school, Valorous reported and showed direct evidence of needing significant help in completing school-based writing tasks. She identified this lack of independence as a problem that she knew she would have to overcome as part of her transition to college. She expected the transition to college would be "hard," explaining that in the past, she had trouble completing two-page writing assignments, and in her senior year dual credit class "it's like 4 or 5 pages, and I just like ramble on and on about the same thing." She explained that she "always need[ed] help to write a paper," and if she did not get help, she procrastinated to avoid writing, then rushed just to get something done. When she did get help, it was typically from Ms. Banner, who she was careful to explain "doesn't baby [her]," but instead "helps [her] like step by step, like 'Is that a good paragraph or not?' or 'Am I on the right track?'"

Valorous's need for support at the step-by-step level was evident in her initial think-aloud, when she was completely silent as she read. When prompted for her thinking, she offered responses such as "I don't know. I understood this page, but not this page. I don't know what to do." When asked what she would do if she were in this situation in a school-based assignment, she said she would "Give up. Cause I don't know how to do it by myself. Ask [a trusted peer] maybe."

Valorous' apparent inability to find a place to start during the think-aloud was worrying. As problematic as simplistic policy calls for independence may be, there is a certain degree of individual capacity that a student needs in order to be successful. I was admittedly relieved, then, to find Valorous at the end of her first semester of college positive and cheerful in her assessment of her academic experiences. And after her second semester, she explained that she

> definitely [felt] more confident about the things that I do. I know that I'm not the best, but that I'm getting better with each class, even if it's just an English class or not because like the other classes help me with writing too. So there's definitely been like a different change each semester.

She conceded that she still had problems with procrastination and time management, and that her grades on individual essays (and hence in classes) suffered because of these habits. In addition, for a time near Spring Break, she experienced a feeling of being out of control similar to what had happened her senior year of high school. "It almost happened," she said, "but I snapped back, I snapped back real quick," this time without the intervention of a team of teachers and a family member. "So that was new, so that was growth," she explained. "I didn't have much help, but I still got it done."

In the think-aloud after her first year of college, Valorous performed much differently from how she did in the previous instance, responding to both the text and the prompt with more strategy and confidence. Most important, perhaps, to her assessment of the difference between the two experiences was this acknowledgement: "I didn't cry." She located the source of her facility with the second task in two places: the difference in task and some new skills she learned in First-Year Composition 2. First, she

explained that in the earlier think-aloud, she did not have a clear sense of what the prompt was asking or a way of understanding the general content of the article, but for the second task, she already had an opinion on the topic of Harriet Tubman appearing on US currency, and this article brought a new point of view to her attention.

So, while the change in the task itself explained her different approach, she also noted that "this time I was just, yeah I can say I was confident this time and it seemed easier" in part because of "the [First-Year Composition 2 class] reflected in it because when we were doing like the complaint letters we couldn't just be like 'Ah, this was awful.' We had to like play both sides. So that helped me reflect on to this and improve her argument." Part of her critique of the author's argument was a lack of a strong acknowledgment of her counter argument, a rhetorical concern she had learned about as a writer as part of her first-year writing experience.

Valorous' view toward developing independence was complicated in that while she acknowledged that high school's more lenient and supportive policies helped earn required credits and graduate, she also reflected that "that's not really how it's gonna work in college." She argued, therefore, that high schools would serve students better by "making sure they're responsible for themselves cause you can't hold their hand forever, cause nobody was holding my hand [in college]." She then laughed and acknowledged that Ms. Banner was, in fact, still "holding her hand" and had helped her think through a few essays and used personal connections to secure her field placement for her introductory education class. Valorous was, though, conscious in trying to manage this relationship with Ms. Banner, recalling "I was trying to get the whole college experience,

like ‘What about when I can’t like go to Bannie’s house all the time?’” so she used self-talk to get herself to “start doing it.”

She noted that the college environment seemed to be set up around independence: “like [in high school] you usually work in groups, but there were rarely any groups in college.” In her First-Year Composition 1 class, she recalled being asked to talk with a classmate only once, and she noted that she did not expect college professors to give “that extra push, like ‘You need to do this now. You can do this now!’ No, it’s set like you need to do it when they tell you to do it, how they tell you to do it.”

D’Metra, like Valorous, identified becoming more independent as a key component of her transition as a college student and writer. But instead of framing this change as a personal accomplishment or positive development in response to new expectations as Valorous did, D’Metra described her growing sense of independence as a disappointing lack of a spirit of collaboration on her campus. In high school, she had said of herself that “discussion promotes creativity and that's all the creativity I have. So, I really need it.” She viewed her independence, then, as less of a *problem of dependence* that was solved and more of a *loss of collaboration* that had helped fuel her thinking and confidence in high school. As she reflected on her first year of college, she noted that

> I’m a lot more independent, definitely cause I don’t always have like people to share feedback with and stuff and like those students who help me process as much. I think that’s the biggest difference in how I process my own thoughts now. Like I used other people to do it in the past, but now I just do it by myself. I used to be like sad, but not I’m just indifferent, it’s just a fact of life. Well I used to like wish it didn’t have to be that way, but I think it’s a little more efficient.

She explained that she was additionally much less reliant on teachers, noting that when she once went to a professor for help with starting a paper the way she would have in high school, "he just told me the same exact thing he said in class, so that threw me off."

She acknowledged that for almost every writing assignment, she had a moment, often at the beginning, at which she wanted to ask her teacher for guidance (this would have been Ms. Banner in high school, she pointed out), but instead she consulted her roommate. She found, however, that her roommate's lack of context-specific information about assignments often made such conversations more frustrating than helpful, leading D'Metra to "figure out a lot by [herself]." Her roommate did, on occasion, serve as an interested reader of her work, sharing on a rough draft comments such as "'What do you mean by this?'" which D'Metra found to be helpful with "language, just articulating my thoughts a little more." Despite their conversations being necessarily limited to surface features rather than the underlying ideas, D'Metra found that sharing her writing with her roommate, whom she considered to be quite smart, gave her "motivation to also be intelligent." Unfortunately, she did not find that motivation widely among her student peers.

Recalling with fondness her high school classmates, D'Metra remembered having looked forward to the transition to college with the anticipation that "everybody's gonna be there, focused," but she found that to be not the case. Instead of having a larger group of more focused peers, D'Metra found that, even with the help of a supportive roommate, she had to be "more self-sufficient and just understanding like this really is an individual journey" and that being a college student is "so much more individual now than [she] ever thought was possible."

She also noticed a different level of in-class support for writing, and she interpreted that difference as a signal for a newly required level of independence. Reflecting on how she learned how to analyze a historical argument, she contrasted what happened in college to what she imagined would have happened in high school: "We probably would have wrote this whole paragraph together, you know? But he just said like, you know, 'You have one and half to two pages to summarize both arguments, and you have one and half to two pages to analyze and choose a side.'" She noted another time when she could detect a difference in how a writing task would have been presented differently in high school, recalling for her written response on the Culture Wars in second semester that "we probably would have spent a week in class outlining it, and you know, up on the board, and what did the author mean by this, and what are some quotes we could use?"

Despite her perception of increased independence in the classroom, D'Metra also acknowledged that the university itself offered a wide range of help in the transition and in fact asserted laughingly that far from exhibiting indifference, the campus community beckoned. "Come, my child, I will guide you," she announced by way of illustration, stretching out her arms for emphasis. She, like most students in the study, took a first-year transition class that helped orient her to the campus and provided a space for discussing frustrations such as her problem with roommates, and she was aware of support services such as math tutoring and the writing center, which she never used because she "write[s] in waves" and the need for help never coincided with a convenient time for going to the writing center.

D'Metra, almost as if answering Valorous' wish for high school to be less supportive of students who are struggling, offered insights on why high schools provide as much support as they do, even if that will not be the case in college. D'Metra was firm in her belief that high school would have prepared her better had teachers not "[held] her hand as much," but she conceded that the degree of accountability teachers face and the diversity of needs students exhibit in high school results in teachers acting not "like professors, [but like] parents." She recalled an example of a student who would misbehave in her senior English class if the teacher did not feed him, so every day the student got a granola bar. In D'Metra's view, a college teacher might tell the student "'I don't care, go, I don't care, get out,'" but high school teachers have "the thought [of parent response] in the back of [their] mind all the time, of you just cannot fail a student no matter what you say, you just can't fail them."

Kendra: Getting "Help from Places That Are Not My Own Brain"

Kendra's story of independence as a part of the college writing transition provides an important contrast to that of Valorous and D'Metra because while she shared the self-assessment of becoming more independent and self-sufficient over the course of the year, she also discussed multiple instances of receiving significant assistance from several sources well beyond any kind of help she received in high school. If D'Metra's feelings of loss for the collaboration she recalled from her high school writing experiences already complicate straightforward calls for independence on the path to development, Kendra's internally conflicted story makes even clearer the need to discuss writing development in terms that are much more nuanced than independence or even self-direction.

At our close-out interview, Kendra reflected that "I just feel like in college it's just that the writing and reading process is so individual, so and I guess independent is what I'm getting at. Because they put all that responsibility on the student, whereas in high school you can still kind of rely on your teacher." She went on to suggest that, while it seems "harsh," one way to prepare students for that transition is to "push us out of the nest" and treat students the way she felt she was in college.

Kendra's evidence for increased independence came largely from a discussion of her third-trimester Shakespeare class, in which the teacher expressly chose not to give reading quizzes (as she experienced in high school and in other college classes) but rather took the position that "if you did it, you did it. If you didn't, too bad." Like D'Metra, Kendra was able to trace some of the support she got in high school to larger policy structures when she explained that "they're trying to get rid of the hand-holding we learned in high school. I feel like a lot of teachers, you know, just the nature of *No Child Left Behind*." Her term "hand-holding" had arisen in an earlier conversation when she explained the struggle she felt in keeping up in chemistry, when the lab assistant would explain the procedure and point out the location of supplies and then "let us go about our way. And I was used to hand-holding." Without that "step-by-step" support to which she was accustomed, she "was flailing" and "didn't know how to ask for help."

She *did*, however, ask for help from a few sources in that early struggle in writing lab reports for biology and chemistry. She asked a classmate who "was also a biology major and was cocky, so [she] assumed she knew what she was doing," but the classmate was reticent to help too much, so Kendra turned to Internet videos on "How to write a lab report." She also received support from a formalized mentoring program for minority

students that paired a group of first-year students with a junior or senior in the same field or major. When Kendra's mentor took the biology course as a first-year student, she herself had gotten help from a friend in the form of all her past writing assignments for the class, "so she was basically providing [her] templates." She and her mentor would look at the completed work together, comparing it to the provided rubric to help Kendra understand the expectations for the assignment.

In her first trimester, Kendra also became a frequent user of the university writing center, where she would take a draft of every paper for her first-year composition class to see "if this flows well...cause you could be making the most excellent points ever and if it doesn't sound right, and the reader can't understand it, then your whole paper is a waste." Much like D'Metra relied on her roommate for feedback on general readability and coherence, Kendra found value in a university-sponsored resource for writing assistance.

As the school year went on, Kendra sought out and received more help, now directly from professors in her philosophy and English classes, leading her to acknowledge that much of her writing in those classes was accomplished with "help from other places besides [her] own brain." Specifically, when the requirements for a second essay in philosophy did not specify a topic, she met with her professor to discuss "an inkling" of what she wanted to write about, and after they talked, "eventually we, he came to the point of, came to the question of *How does that relate to these other philosophers we read about happiness*?" After the brainstorming session, Kendra worked on the shared idea and returned for another office hours visit to take in a title and a thesis.

Her professor edited the title to make it align with the thesis, and he suggested she make an outline to clarify her thinking. He began sharing his thoughts and Kendra "was

literally typing out what the professor was saying as he was talking, like 'What's the flip side?'" When she asked for suggestions on how to write her outline "he said, 'Okay, you're gonna have I. Introduction, and I'm like *I. Introduction*. And then he would, he talked so fast, but um he literally made the outline for me, like the introduction and all those bullet points. It literally came from him, everything, actually. This is not me at all, it's just him. It's just everything."

Similarly, when she went to her Shakespeare professor the next trimester, she took a thesis, an outline, and her laptop, noting "I always bring my laptop with me now, or they type for me, and I'm like 'Wow! You don't have to do that; I'm okay with putting in the work.'" There, she got feedback that led to a significantly different approach from what she had initially intended. In addition, her professor, concerned that she was a first-year student who had accidentally enrolled in a junior-level class, shared with her a sample essay that they went over together to improve her "prose, or the language she was looking for."

Important to understanding Kendra's belief that she became more independent over the course of the year is her depiction of the help she received from her AP English teacher in high school, which she referred to as "indirect" help, as quite different from the help she got in college. She recalled a time she took a draft of an essay in for feedback and her teacher asked a series of questions such as "'Does this part actually fit in this essay?' and 'Where can you move it so that it flows seamlessly?" She also indicated in high school a disdain for getting help from others while she was writing, because then "it's not really my idea, it's not an original idea." So while Kendra's initiative to meet with her teacher in high school and college can be read as self-directed in both contexts,

the kind of help she got in college was much more direct than in high school, and much more difficult to characterize as evidence of increased independence, despite her reflections on her first year.

Anna: Calling Out *De*pendence as a Sign of Development

Anna, like Kendra, frequently expressed a dislike for getting feedback on her writing as she drafted, noting that she did not "usually show people [her] writing when [she is] in the middle of it...cause [she] feels like changing things in the middle...it's like the Butterfly Effect." But beyond that, she held a more general aversion to any sort of critical feedback on her writing. "Normally I hate it when people critique my writing," she mentioned in nearly every conversation, whether it came from her mom (her most trusted reader), her roommate (whom she respected highly as a writer), or from peers in classroom settings. Anna's story provides an important counterpoint to the stories of independence so far because, by her own acknowledgment, becoming somewhat more comfortable with receiving help as a writer was a significant aspect of growth in her transition as a college writer. In other words, she saw the development of a stronger sense of the possibilities of dependence as a positive change in her writing process and in her attitudes about herself and her writing.

From her comments in high school, it was clear that Anna took a broadly social view toward writing and understood that she learned and improved as a writer from interaction with others. In our early conversations, for example, she pointed out that she learned how to make certain argumentative moves as a writer by arguing with her father:

> I always argue with my dad, I love my dad, but we argue a lot. And he actually taught me how to argue...you can't just be hard-headed because he's very hard-

> headed and I learned that if I want to deal with him...I have to make some concessions, but you know you have to stick with what you believe in.

And as noted earlier in this chapter, she looked for ideas for her writing in the published work of others and recognized that she has grown as a result of some complex writing tasks in the past.

Anna's stories of writing in college, unlike those from high school, were characterized by occasional examples of collaboration, such as a peer review session that she described as "not one of [her] favorite things, but everything turned out fine," or getting assistance from her suitemates on content development for an essay on a recent online conflict between hip-hop artists Drake and Meek Mill. These instances set the stage for more purposeful, self-initiated collaboration on her writing that Anna identified as a significant aspect of her development as a writer.

At the end of her comparative religions class, Anna was asked to write ten pages comparing Jamaican Rastafari and Haitian Vodou across the myth, ritual, and symbol in each, using evidence and support from three of several theorists they had read. This assignment took Anna to a crisis point in which she was near the deadline and had written nine pages, but only about one religion. She characterized her feelings at the moment as "'Holy shit!' What was I going to do? Organizationally, I was really like frustrated. I didn't know what I was doing here." A week before, she and a classmate had met, at his suggestion, to split up some of the content development work, sharing notes on the different religions. The day before the paper was due, she reached back out to him with the plea: "'Okay, I don't know what I'm doing, and it's really weird for me cause usually this is what I'm really good at.'" They met and exchanged papers, using the commenting

feature to provide each other feedback. As she read his paper, she provided some grammar feedback, but noticed his was "super great" and was "organizationally top notch."

After they read each other's papers, he provided what she felt to be "great, nice, constructive criticism" about the strengths of what she had done so far, but very specific ideas for what to do next: "'Cut down the history, do more about the symbol, and use quotes instead of talking about the theorists first." She took this feedback, along with the model of her peer's essay and got back to work, completing her essay in time and earning an A on the paper. Anna credited her peer completely both for her success on that paper and for her becoming a bit more open to getting feedback on her writing under certain circumstances.

An assignment in her next semester indicated that this example of increased openness to help was more perhaps than a singular response to a crisis. Anna was writing an essay on President Obama's influence on the Supreme Court, a topic about which she was both passionate and knowledgeable. As she was finishing, she decided to send the paper to her friend who was a political science major, asking him to "read this over and make sure it looks good because [he knows] literally everything about our government." Clearly interested in his additional content expertise, Anna was pleased when he responded with the suggestion to add a detail about past bipartisan support for Merrick Garland. Reflecting on the decision to voluntarily invite a peer to read her work, she recalled her thought process: "'You just know more about this stuff than I do,' so it's smart, it's a smart decision for you to look at this after I'm done writing it it cause you just know more." She did not mention that she particularly enjoyed the idea of sharing

her writing, but she understood that it made sense if her goal was to produce the best piece she could. “In high school,” she pointed out, “I would have never been like ‘Hey, let’s get together and work on this,’ so that definitely shifted.”

Discussion of Student Independence Claims

As the preceding examples illustrate, suggesting as the CCSS do that one can offer a singular “portrait of students” who are college-ready writers is unlikely, even when focusing on a single aspect of the transition, such as the notion of becoming more independent or self-directed. The complexity of the cases comes, in part, from students’ different perceptions of what counts as independence and in what contexts it matters. To Valorous, calling herself more independent pointed to her need to rely less frequently and heavily on others to produce text, meet deadlines, and remain motivated. To D’Metra, becoming more independent was more like adjusting to loneliness, as she came to understand that her work as a writer was not going to be buoyed by the collaboration with peers and teachers that she enjoyed in high school. To Kendra, it was a recognition that college instructors provided less accountability for the completion of assignments, though at the same time they provided significant help in idea generation, organization, and matters of style when she asked for it. And last, Anna’s case points out that independence may in fact be a state to develop *away from* as she began to add the support of peers to her “toolbox” of skills and practices that she used as a writer in college.

Entangled in their discussions of developing independence as writers is the perhaps more fundamental notion of developing personal responsibility, the idea of “taking care of one’s business” on a day-to-day basis, as evidenced by both Valorous’ and Kendra’s assertion that there is less “hand-holding” in college. While some of their

experiences make a case for that kind of personal responsibility as a condition for success in college, others trouble the assumption that succeeding in college requires total independence in the more basic sense of personal responsibility and self-management.

Elijah, Valorous, and Kendra, for example, all mentioned the need for punctuality and timeliness as part of their assessment of successful college transition, part of a view of college having more rigid rules for conduct of all sorts. Elijah explained that class attendance is so important because "some teachers would like literally mark you down if you're late like 2 seconds." Valorous noted that she felt college is "stricter" and the mantra in college is "Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines." "Get your stuff in on time, or you're gonna be in trouble," she reflected, "and that was me. I was in trouble." While Kendra never expressed missing deadlines as a concern, she echoed Valorous' sense of rigidity of timelines, explaining that "it's not like high school where you can talk to the teachers and [get an extension.] No, it's 'If you don't get it done you just take the bad grade.'"

Carter and Anna offer a contrasting view on the opinion that the transition to college required a demonstrably higher level of personal responsibility, especially interesting since Carter went to the same school as Elijah and Valorous, and Anna to the same school as Kendra. Carter pointed out that in high school, "if you turned [a writing assignment] in late, then the punishment was a lot harsher," noting that at the same time turning in work in high school "didn't have as much of a rewarding feeling as it does in college." Anna's perceptions aligned with Carter's when she noted that she "had other experiences with professors where I'd miss class and I'd be like 'Can I make this up later?" and they're like 'Yeah!'" Without suggesting that any of these single accounts can

describe general trends at an institution, the presence of contradictions even in this very small sample makes arguments for similarity for requirements within an institution or even type of institution (public, open-admissions junior college versus competitive private university) unconvincing.

D'Metra shared Carter's and Anna's assessment of the relative lenience of college, noting for example that "a lot of my professors were personally very understanding" and "everything's a lot more liberal." She framed her interpretation of this lenience around "the whole lie of 'college is gonna be so more rigorous.'" From her point of view, this tradition of telling students to expect things to be much harder and stricter in college is designed to "scare the kids into acting right in high school" and that for some students that narrative is useful. "Maybe if I was worse in high school," she reflected, "then I would have gotten a rude awakening, but I never really had that transition."

So, while moving away from the notion of *independence* to *self-direction*, with its broader and more socially encompassing view, does seem to be a better way of understanding this aspect of the transition for students, even it is problematic if considered uncritically. Kendra, for example, exhibited plenty of self-direction as she struggled to learn how to write in her science classes. She asked a classmate, she consulted the Internet, she visited her teaching assistant, she took advantage of her university mentoring program, and she tried to use the writing center to help her understand what she needed to do differently on her lab reports. Though one could argue that perhaps she was going to the wrong sources of help or that she did not sufficiently engage with the help that she had, it seems disingenuous to suggest that she did not

display the kinds of initiative and self-direction that the CCSS say lead to success in college writing. Her "failure" here seems not related to her behavior or attitudes at all, but rather a fundamental mismatch between her goals as a writer and the expectations inherent in writing successfully in chemistry (discussed further in the next chapter).

Kendra's case also calls into question the degree to which *self-direction* is equally achievable when interactions among students and potential sources of help are mediated by factors such as race and gender (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013; Welton & Martinez, 2013). As part of her reflection on the year, she noted that largely due to her identity as an African-American/Latina woman, she felt that the "alienation and isolation...can be so overwhelming to the point where you don't even want to ask for help." But, of course, she did find ways to ask for help, yet she found that "because of how competitive" the academic culture was, she just wanted to "sprint out of the class environment." Zarina's response toward engineering culture at her school was similarly one of alienation, and she noted that "they're all trying to one up you...they're like so gassed up in general, they're like 'I can do this by myself,' and when you ask for help, it's like *you* can't do it." D'Metra also acknowledged feeling that it was difficult to ask for help for fear of being labeled incompetent because of her identity as a black woman.

Taken together, the students' experiences in this study suggest that teachers and policymakers might use caution when claiming that independence is either a goal or sign of development unless students are being asked to do writing that is completely routine to them (which seems counter to the very notion of development). Students, particularly those who do not see themselves fully represented in the academic culture of their institutions, might take those admonitions for independence at their face value and

assume that it is not acceptable to ask for help, or believe that their requests for help with mark them as inadequate in some way. If some aspects of college readiness involve independence, students need clarity on what exactly needs to be done on their own. Writing, I would argue, is not one of those things.

Even the seemingly more appropriate call for self-direction needs to be considered critically. The stories of students in this study suggest that finding sources of help and asking for that help does not work the same way for every student, with the degree of alignment between students' cultural backgrounds and those of their teachers and classmates complicating what some might see as a neutral transaction. Expecting the same developmental path, whether to independence, strategic interdependence, or self-direction—like other expectations for standardization of writers' lives and processes—seems unproductive given the richness and variety of experiences in these students' transitions.

CHAPTER 5

WRITING INTO (AND AROUND) NEW ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS IN COLLEGE

While students in this study had mixed assessments of the level of overall challenge that the transition to college learning and writing presented, they consistently mentioned two aspects of learning in college that were significantly different from high school and thus presented difficulty for them: keeping up with the reading demands of college and learning to conform to specialized disciplinary writing expectations. Building from the arguments in Chapter 4 concerning students' highly situated and therefore unique transition experiences, this chapter will explore, first, how students exercised agency and employed context-specific strategies to cope with reading challenges with which they were unfamiliar and then how students engaged with writing in new disciplines, "successfully" or not, taking on or resisting new ways of writing, and hence, new ways of participating in and identifying with the world.

Responding to the Increased Reading Demands of College

Carroll (2002) points out that students' development as writers in college is inextricably linked to their work and development as readers, particularly as the expectations for reading, writing, and writing about that reading all become more complex at the same time. The think-aloud task in this study was designed with the interconnection between reading and writing in mind. In addition to revealing students' differing attitudes and processes as writers, it demonstrated that the students in the study were very different as readers as well. Some found the reading tasks challenging, asking frequently what key words meant and finding it difficult to articulate the main points the

authors argued; others had little trouble identifying central ideas and made critical commentary about the pieces right away. Because the think-aloud was neither designed nor analyzed as a measure of reading comprehension, however, I will not offer specific findings about the particular students, but rather will point out that it revealed that students' skill, habits, and processes as readers were yet another way that they varied as high school seniors.

Differences in Reading Expectations between High School and College

Students' experiences in connected reading-writing tasks varied in their last year of high school, largely because of the courses they took. Some students in the study reported that they wrote about texts in high school with great frequency. Students who took AP English wrote about full novels in out-of-class essays and brief passages in timed essays; students wrote essays in history about collections of short documents. But for some students, text-based writing did not make up a significant part of their work. Elijah, for example, reflected in his final interview that "most of like the writing I did in high school was basically, we didn't do much about like looking up on, read an article and write a paper about it, most of the stuff I did in [high school] was like trying to relate everything back for me." He cited one exception from his senior rhetoric class as being "the book in the beginning when you had to read a book over the summer and you had to do that, talk about it and how society was different and all that stuff."

Other students who had taken classes that were more text-focused still found that the reading expectations were more difficult in college. Kendra noted that reading for her college philosophy course was particularly challenging and that she "hadn't experienced anything like that, not even in AP English or any other reading intensive courses like

that" and that while high school teachers "try to prepare you … it's one thing to tell you, but it's another to actually be in that environment and reading those types of books and just living that life." Anna offered additional insight, noting that for some writing tasks "we had so many readings and … that I think was the most daunting thing about the paper, there was just so much material here we needed to draw from."

Anna's comment revealed a difference in the relationship between reading and writing tasks in high school and college. Many, but of course not all, of the reading tasks in high school were framed as a clear step toward a particular a writing assignment. For example, when students in AP English chose a book for their outside reading project (ORP), they knew they would be writing an essay on that book, and they oftentimes had the prompt (or a choice of prompts) at the time of the book selection. The documents students read in connection with document-based questions (DBQs) in history class were very short and read with the explicit goal of using them to write an analytical essay in response to a provided prompt almost immediately after reading them. The relationship between reading and writing tasks was clear and straightforward; students were not doing voluminous weekly reading without a sense of what they would eventually have to write about.

This is not to say that in college, students did not also have tightly aligned reading and writing tasks. Elijah, for example, took a class on critical reading comprehension and therefore routinely read short texts such as "two articles about two famous writers and how like they became famous" and analyzed, through writing, their main ideas as well as similarities and differences. Similarly, in an introductory history class, D'Metra "had to read this like chapter basically of a book and write an analysis of the two opposing

arguments and then you have to analyze both of [them] and say which one you agree with." Students reported little trouble in completing the reading associated with such tasks, in which the texts were short and the tasks associated with them was clear and immediately presented, but this was not true for reading in the broader sense.

Strategic Management of the Reading Load in College

In the group interview held in the summer following students' first year, there was wide consensus that a key to transitioning to college writing was developing a contextually sensitive method of determining what had to be read when, if at all, in order to still be successful (that is, to achieve a high grade) in a class. Anna commented that "it's definitely less about like college-level reading and just knowing *what* you have to read, because like yeah it would be great if you could read everything and have the time, but it's just not possible. You just can't read everything you're assigned." The others around the table indicated their assent verbally and through gesture, though the approaches students took to enacting this principle in their first year varied considerably.

Anna's approach to reading throughout her first year of college offers important insight on how a self-identified strong reader and writer managed the adjustment. In her first trimester history of India class, she explained that "what we were supposed to do, and what [she] did the first week, is you were supposed to read the book, read the chapters in the book and take notes on the chapter." She did this the for the first class session and observed that it took over two hours and that "oh my god then [she got to class] and he gives us the notes, he like presents them, and you like take notes in class, and I was like 'Well, at least I don't have to do it this time!'" Because of her perception that the lectures made reading redundant, she stopped reading for the class. She described

her adjustment as learning “how to be a savvy college student very quickly. By the end of the quarter, [she] wasn't even reading at all. [She] was just looking for answers” to the online quizzes professors gave.

In a philosophy class in her third trimester, she explained that the professor assigned readings to be completed before class, but, much like the professor of Indian history, this professor would make explication of the text the focus of class time, so “it was just easier to let him explain it in class, so instead of like reading it and being confused once and then going over it and like getting it, it was just easier to get it the first time without confusing [herself] in the beginning.” She would follow along with the text in class and “underline, star, ... and then when [she] was writing the papers, [she] would go back and it would all be right there, [her] notations and [her] notes, and [she] would write page numbers in [her] notes so [she] could go back and do that.” She went on to evaluate her strategy, saying that “the trickiest part, was like correlating notes, book, argument, so that was something [she] learned through that process” and that this “worked well,” and she was “sure it won't work well continuing in school... but it was like ‘This is what I've gotta do now, and it's workin’ and it's fine.’”

Zarina’s approach to determining what to read was similarly flexible and context dependent, though perhaps not quite as utilitarian as Anna’s. She explained her frustration about reading for chemistry class in the group interview, sharing with the other participants that she had “to read it like 5 times and take notes on it 10 times” but still “won’t get it, and [she] just feels like some things aren’t meant to be reading classes,” but that the size of some classes makes any other approach impossible, from her point of view.

She explained how she met the challenge of reading for chemistry by reversing the order of reading and class discussion, noting that the exam schedule made this possible:

> I have chem discussion on Thursday and we're supposed to do our homework for chem discussion, and I do my homework, my chem homework, I sit down on the weekends and do it, so I'm always like a chapter behind, but the way the class is structured, by the time the exam comes it doesn't matter, I'm not behind. [...] But that was just to sharpen up what we already learned in lecture.

Zarina shared in interviews throughout the year that her commitment to reading the assigned texts varied by class, and that she could tell in which classes she "was fine without reading" and that in an economics class with pre-lecture videos (which were similar to pre-class readings in function, if not form), she "didn't really take the pre-lecture seriously and...would just come to class and...not know what we were doing at all."

Kendra identified strongly as a reader but reported that she did not finish a novel required of her for her first-year composition class despite "want[ing] to finish it [laughs]. But science classes," indicating the competing time demands that made completing everything impossible, from her point of view. She compensated for not having read by using her identity as a "huge feminist" to "wing" a response on how gender norms are represented in the novel.

Elijah, on the other hand, shared in both the end of project interview and in an earlier conversation that he is "not a reader" and when he was assigned to read a popular text (that also happened to have been made into a film) in his first-year composition class

class, "she literally gave us two weeks to read a book, and I was like 'I'm not gonna read the book. I'm just gonna watch the movie.' I'm good at watching movies, but I'm not good at reading books." When he shared a version of this story with the project group, it was met with much approving laughter but also the caveat from another participant that he better have searched the Internet for the differences between the movie and the film. He explained that he did not, but that the teacher had warned that the book went into much more detail than the film did. He received an A on the paper.

Carter's experience offers a distinct counterpoint as he recalled in the group interview that the very idea of transitioning to college reading is in some ways determined by discipline: "Artists don't read books. I didn't have to do any reading. You know I have to read articles for English essays and things, but I never had to read any books. I didn't have to read anything for my assignments, so I didn't."

Knowing Writing Tasks Helps Shape How to Manage Reading

Students' responses above make it clear that they viewed reading as work to be managed depending on the context, rather than faithfully completed for its own sake. As Anna's story suggests, one of the ways in which students prioritized reading, then, was when it was connected to a writing task. It is in this way that students' writing processes, broadly construed, become so entangled with the readings expected of them in college. Anna offered this insight into how her writing process shifted relative to reading tasks: "I mean cause like, you are supposed to read, but really you only need to read to like write the papers." So, in order to "save time and [her] brain," she would only read content that was explicitly tied to an announced writing project. For papers in her Indian history class, for example, the professor posted prompts on a class website and "each prompt was like

centered on one chapter," so she eventually realized that she did not have to read or take notes on the chapters she was not going to write about. She would, however, "take half-ass notes [while the professor lectured] for the rest of everything cause [she] don't want to look like an asshole you know, just sitting there" in class.

Kendra reported a similar process strategy when she reflected on how she felt her writing and thinking had changed over her first year. She said that the first word she thought of was "Alert. I just feel like I have to be more active in my thinking the first time around instead of you know like reading, not reading as closely the first time." In a separate point in this conversation, she explained that for her world literature class, she

> wrote notes too cause this is my textual, this is sort of my outline, actually, I would just go, while I was reading the book I would write down like textual evidence that I thought would be helpful in my reflection essay even if I didn't use it and the page number and things like that. And I would make small arguments, small points.

Like Anna did with the prompts centered on specific textbook chapters, she filtered her reading energy through the expectations of the writing task so that by the time she had finished reading, she was prepared to write.

So, while professors sometimes tried to incentivize reading through quizzes (often online, due immediately before the class), students reported finding ways around those quizzes, including sitting in front of the computer with the text open and looking for answers simply to complete the task. Knowing a writing prompt at least focused students' attention on a particular text, though this knowledge also made it likely that other texts that would not be the focus of written assessment would not be prioritized.

Writing Development through Reading

Students' perceptions of the relationship between reading and writing were not, however, solely about "managing" reading or minimizing the amount of reading that they had to complete. In fact, students shared a range of ways in which they saw reading in college contributing positively to their development as thinkers and writers. Anna, who spoke most strategically of managing the reading load, credited in her final interview the ability to read well as one of the main factors of her success in college. In a specific reflection on her first-year composition class, she noted that "we did a lot of learning by looking at other people's stuff, which I thought was pretty cool actually," including looking at op-eds from newspapers for the purpose of analyzing how an author made and supported claims. Carter echoed this indication of reciprocity in development between reading and writing when he noted that he started to "notice the craftsmanship that goes into things that I would have taken for granted reading, you know, a few years ago."

Anna also pointed out that, despite her efforts to minimize readings required of her in classes, she was actually reading more than she did in high school, though what she was reading had little to do with the school's curriculum. She explained that after her first year of college she "definitely read a lot more now and not in the traditional way," instead following people and events on Twitter and reading news through her phone app. "I read news stories like all day every day," she explained, contending that "I'm staying informed [and] I'm definitely thinking more critically about the world around me in a political sense and I'm definitely a lot more interested in that."

Kendra offered a reflection that is perhaps more in line with the institutional view of "successful" engagement with academic reading, noting that "the readings were so

dense...but it was a great kind of dense...and you have to stay on top of the reading in order to be successful in the class itself cause you have discussions and papers on it, and it depends on the book. It was challenging and very enlightening." She acknowledged that ultimately the relationship between reading and writing was positive for her, even when (or perhaps particularly) when it is at its most challenging:

> The writing stays, the reading stays in my head longer, like I feel like I could talk about philosophy with someone other than my professor and feel confident in what I was saying. Whereas in the past I might have read a reading and I'd be like, "I don't really remember as much as I could have," or "I don't know what Plato said," and now I'm like "I know what Plato said and I'm gonna tell you right now." I could do that with complete confidence.

While Kendra's comments are most in line with what teachers and institutions want to believe about their students, her dedication to struggling through challenging prose and then finding the act of writing about it rewarding for the additional insight it gave to that text was anomalous in this project.

That said, Zarina and D'Metra both found illuminating the requirement to read texts that are very similar to the ones they were producing, or may someday produce. When Zarina had to read scientific reports to cite in her own lab report, she found the affirmation in noticing "it's like all formatted the same way as how we do this, so like looking at that, and then writing mine, I see why I wrote mine the way I did because like real published research papers are in the same format." Similarly, D'Metra, a history education major, explained that she did not realize that people wrote books that put forth their own argument but also relied on so many citations of others' work and ideas: "I

didn't really see a lot of books [in high school] with so much, you know they would have like in-text citations but a lot of it wouldn't have in the back of the book, 'Let me show you the 30 pages.'" I will turn now to the extended example of D'Metra and her experiences with (not) reading the very book to which she was referring to illustrate further how writing tasks and reading tasks interconnected in her first year.

Focal Case (D'Metra): "I'm a good s*cammer*. I mean *skimmer!*"

Just as other students offered context-specific strategies for determining how their writing process would shape itself around required reading tasks, D'Metra explained that there was so much reading required of her that she "decided to focus on things that we did get graded on." Indeed, her comment illuminated a trend in student decision making related to determining how and to what extent a reading task was attached to a writing task that would be evaluated and, hence, become part of the course grade. As the following case demonstrates, however, whether or not something was going to result in a grade was not necessarily a sufficient motivator for getting a reading assignment done, requiring even more savvy on the part of a student seeking to write in ways that are deemed successful by the institution.

By way of background, in her senior year interview, D'Metra explained that "I like to read but I can't read if I don't enjoy the book, I can't read it [Laughs] cause I'm about to go to sleep every time. It's like a lullaby to me." Her comment came up as part of the explanation of why she opted not to take AP English, noting as well that "a lot of it's my personal laziness" as well. In the group interview, D'Metra acknowledged that not completing most reading assignments was not new behavior in college, noting that she "didn't really read what [she] was supposed to read in high school, and [she] didn't really

read what [she] was supposed to in college," adding that she is more of a "'let's talk about it' type of person.'"

Her mother had shared with me that "before D'Metra could talk, [she] would read to her cause…[she] just um sat down and read to [her] kids every night before they went to bed." "I know that sound corny," she explained, "but I truly did." She also confirmed, though, that she did not believe that "D'Metra loves to read" particularly when compared to her sister who would read Harry Potter novels voraciously. D'Metra also shared on multiple occasions that she identified as a *slow reader*, explaining that "I don't read fast at all, I read well, and I can comprehend, but it will take me a minute to get it all down," and acknowledging that this was a source of concern for her as she enters a discipline that relies heavily on reading and writing.

The particular writing process in question in this case comes from a history class; D'Metra described it as her "favorite subject" and called the writing task "a very interesting paper." She was assigned to read a book, written by her professor, about the Culture Wars and write an essay that answered several questions on a prompt that the professor provided. She recalled that the paper was originally due in early April, but upon returning from Spring Break, the professor announced that the class was behind, so he set a new due date in late April. In addition, "he was like 'And also, I don't want to read papers, so just write the paragraphs, just answer each question in paragraph form because I just want to know the answer to each question.' That's what he told us, and to me that's just like, 'What do you mean?' That has never happened in my whole life!" D'Metra's concern over the shift from an essay to a list of disconnected paragraph responses was especially evident in the personal communication she sent to me, informing me with

distress that the project she planned to use for her process log had just become "not a paper."

True to the characterization she had offered on other occasions, even with a writing assignment that was a significant part of her grade, even with a book written by the person teaching the class (and reading the paper about that book), and even when armed with the strategic tools of a highlighter and sticky notes, "every time [she] would open the book, [she] would like fall asleep," resulting in her not reading "large sections" so that "there are pages of it that [she had] never seen." She employed several tactics as she worked through/around the book, including paying careful attention in class and noticing that each question was connected to a specific section of the book, making the search for relevant text more manageable.

As she began drafting her responses, she noted that her answer to the first question was too long given the overall page requirement. She used that circumstance to set up an appointment with the professor to get feedback on the length, but she acknowledged that she had "ulterior motives" and that she "felt horrible" that she was actually going to him to see if he could tell that she had not read the book. To prepare, she "read a little bit from the last few paragraphs so if he happened to ask me about it," she could respond knowledgeably, but also acknowledged that she "kind of really liked the rush of 'Will he know that I did not read the book'?"

When she reflected on how she shaped her writing process around the reality of not reading the text on which the writing was based, D'Metra noted with an apt slip that she "learned that [she's] a pretty good, what is called? *Scammer*? No, *skimmer*! [laughs]" and that it was sufficient to "look for really good quotes and...just highlight them, [and]

take those quotes out and expand on them based on the stuff he said in class, so I knew it was true."

Though D'Metra never explicitly made this connection, she explained that the professor took a consistently "relaxed" approach to the task, which perhaps accounted for her similar approach to the reading. From the initial shift of the assignment from an essay to a series of questions (which she noted offered the benefit of not requiring transitions, but instead necessitating more focused, detailed information for each question), to answering directly in class one of the questions from the task ("Somebody blatantly asked him in class like 'What are you trying to say in the book?' And he told us!"), the professor emanated, in D'Metra's words a "very relaxed, 'try your best and I will see that you tried your best' vibe." Much as Anna did, she acknowledged that she "will probably have to change just because all I will be doing is reading and writing, but right now, it's not for me. I'll just read what I have to."

Discussion of the Relationship between Writing and Reading in College

Because of the strong connection between reading assignments and writing tasks in college, in order to navigate the transition to college writing, the students in this study had to find ways to respond to college reading expectations. They did so in a number of ways: by selecting what to read when, by reading just enough to get by, by relying on their teacher to present the same content in class, and by refusing to do it all together and hoping for the best. More specifically, Anna developed a strategy for highlighting passages that her professor called attention to that would become the focus of her attention later; Kendra relied on her background knowledge of feminism to mask a

reading gap; and D'Metra reported success in searching for key quotes that supported ideas she had learned about in class discussion.

Although there was variety both within and among participants' responses to college reading, it is clear that they viewed reading less as a task that was intrinsically worth their time and effort and more of an obligation to be selectively engaged in, if at all. But by and large, their choices were informed by the context and demonstrated a degree of strategy or planning rather than outright refusal (Elijah excepted). Some students offered time constraints as a reason for being selective, pointing to the volume of the reading and the competition of other tasks and activities, but it is impossible to verify the accuracy of those claims, and is not within in the scope of this project to do so. Most students did point out, however, that their writing process in college changed because of having more unscheduled time, so the claim of having too little time to read seems an insufficient explanation. Echoes of Durst's (1999) observation about students' utilitarian desire toward streamlining writing processes in first-year year composition also seems to offer insight here. While students might respect the idea of reading everything asked of them, they were not going to do so, at least not under their current circumstances.

One way to interpret students' response to reading (and the accompanying writing) in their first year of college is the view put forth by Rebekah Nathan and taken up by Arum and Roska (2011) in their assessment of the limited learning occurring on college campuses: that students have "developed and acquired 'the art of college management' in which success is achieved not through hard work but through 'controlling college by shaping schedules, taming professors, and limiting workload'" (p. 4). D'Metra's example also implicates the role of the teacher in such behavior,

particularly when viewed from George Kuh's "disengagement compact" which Arum and Roska (2011) describe as the unspoken agreement that professors will not make college students work very hard, lightening their own workload and, in the bargain, keeping students happy with high grades. While the examples in this study align to an extent to such cynical readings, it is important to take into account that students also expressed feelings of guilt or embarrassment over not doing everything they were asked to do, and they assumed their ability to do so was going to be short-lived and that they would have to change their behaviors eventually.

These acknowledgments seem both to confirm and complicate the sense that students were participating in purposeful manipulation of the cracks in the system. Beyond the cavalier sense of entitlement implied by Arum and Roska (2011), though, students seemed legitimately overwhelmed by new reading expectations and sought ways to prioritize all that they needed to get done. Writing assignments, as announced assessment of both students' reading and writing played a large part in shaping those priorities, helping students select *which* texts to read, and shaping *how* they read them in preparation for a writing task. In this regard, students' "management" behavior was less a sign of individual deviance and more a consequence of a key contemporary understanding of the social impact of assessment.

Scott and Inoue (2015) contend that all *writing* assessment "applies specific values and also encourages writers to adopt those values" (p. 30). While their argument refers to what teachers and students value in a piece of writing, it is not difficult to see how, by extension, writing assignments value certain readings by making them the focus of the task and de-value others (even if unintentionally) by not focusing on them.

Students might choose to respond to such institutional decisions by adopting those same values, earning free time without apparent penalty in the exchange. In this regard, Anna's experience in writing the essay at the end of her comparative religions class, presented in the previous chapter, demonstrates the difficulty students face when those immediate value-markers are not present, and the entirety of a semester's reading is expected to be drawn upon in a single written piece.

Students did not express feeling proud of this aspect of their transition, but they acknowledged that it was as a part of their reality and displayed a high degree of understanding of context-dependent decision making in determining how reading and writing expectations would shape their participation in classrooms and college culture. As participants in the culture of the university, which prizes and relies heavily on the practice of reading as a learning activity, students demonstrated Miller and Goodnow's (1995) notion of moving "beyond the passive individual" who dutifully completes every assignment to aspects of a "resisting person" who seeks to find ways to gain the official rewards of participating in college (grades, strong transcripts) without doing all of the work.

"There's Not a Template Anymore": Rewards and Challenges of Disciplinary Writing

The second key challenge that students reported from their first year of college writing came from writing in new academic disciplines. Unlike their responses to reading, which were more about the change in the volume of reading or the apparent value of time invested in doing the reading, their responses to writing in new disciplines involved the struggles and benefits involved in doing something that seemed distinctly *new*. While their stories of learning to write in a new discipline involved learning to write

in new textual forms and to follow certain textual conventions, their work in becoming writers in new disciplines also reflected the notion that writers "are not separate from their writing and they don't just quickly and seamlessly adapt to new situations" (Scott, 2015, p. 49).

Roozen (2015b) echoes the idea that identity and writing are intertwined in complex ways, noting that the degree to which a writer feels comfortable aligning with a community's literacy practices can reveal how willing that writer is to participate in the community itself. The connection between writing and identity informs Estrem's (2015) assertion that "for many students in college encountering disciplinary writing for the first time, discipline-specific writing threatens their sense of self because these ways of thinking and writing are so distinct from other more familiar reading and writing practice" (p. 56). Students in this study, through their successes and "failures," demonstrate the complex ways identity and writing interconnect in new academic settings.

The Range of (Disciplinary) Writing in High School

Unquestionably, the subject in which students in this study wrote the most in their last semester of high school was in English. What they wrote varied depending on which course they took, with students such as Anna who took AP English focusing on "giving examples from the text" as they "make a thesis based on a prompt" for the AP exam describing a very different experience from Elijah, who took regular-level rhetoric early in the year, in which he wrote "basically about, things that are related to us" or Carter who, as noted earlier, said he would not have been expected to complete a task as complex as critiquing an author's argument in his senior rhetoric class. Kendra pointed

out the difference in writing in English as being "you have to know the information before you start writing the essay," stressing the amount of thought and planning that went into this kind of writing for her.

Despite the centrality English played in the writing lives of these students, they did not talk about writing in English as a *discipline* in the commonly held theoretical sense, as a knowledge community with certain ways of knowing and communicating that knowledge (Lerner, 2015). But they did discuss the writing they did in English with a certain perception of authenticity when contrasted with writing they did in other classes, particularly science and social studies. Zarina characterized the writing she did in high school science as "typically just notes straight from the board, and it's really monotonous just copying word for word, and I'm not really soaking things in." Kendra offered a similar characterization to the writing in science being "reading guides that go along with the chapters," which she saw as writing designed to "teach you this information, then we'll test you on it," a clear example of Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken's (2009) notion of "writing without composing" (p. 151). Elijah's explanation of the writing he did in science was also tied specifically to assessment, saying that he wrote "just basically during tests and stuff...you usually have a question where you have to write basically about how does it work and all that stuff."

In addition to note-taking and assessment-based writing in science, students reported doing a limited amount of more extended writing and, linked to those limitations, an unclear sense of what exactly they were doing in that writing. Anna described a recent lab report in which "you just had to explain what you did, what the materials were, give the background, the points of view, why this way was better, etc. etc.

etc." Kendra explained that in her AP biology course, "we only wrote one lab report in the entire course. It was a year-long course" (stressing the small amount of writing in such a long period of time), and Zarina expressed frustration that in lab reports in a way that previewed her concerns about them in college: "The teachers are looking for one specific thing, so even then it's not really my words, it's something that'll please the teacher...because there's a right or wrong answer in science, like *this is what is actually happening*."

Zarina's comment points to a tendency students had to make a distinction between writing that was interpretive, such as what they did in English, and writing that was more information-based or reporting, as what they felt were doing in science. Interestingly, the writing they did in high school social studies fell, in their point of view, much more to the level of reporting than interpretation. Several students mentioned a writing task they referred to as *DBQs*, which present students with a background essay, several short excerpted passages from documents, and a prompt that poses a binary question. Beck (2009) found that the high school students she interviewed about writing in history had little sense of why they were doing these tasks, a result echoed by this study's participants.

Anna describes DBQs as "all in class...and based on documents...and we were trying to say one way or the other. I think the recent one was: 'Was the Cold War caused by this or this?'" Zarina's stance on writing a DBQs was that "it was like very laid out for you...everything that the teacher wants is in the little packet and then all your points are in the packet and in the end the teacher is just reading thirty copies of the same essay." D'Metra's assessment was similar, as she noted that "with DBQs...everything

was the same. Every student had to write the same stuff." After a year of writing history in college, D'Metra reflected that writing DBQs "teach[es] you how to write [in terms of structure], but I don't think like academically it prepared me cause it made me think in black and white," and they provided little practice on how to "form [her] opinions about stuff." Carter's take on the DBQs echoes that of his peers when he noted "in history [we did] do a lot of essays, but again those were just filling all the information out and getting everything that was required done...just informational stuff."

So, while students in the study may have had exposure to writing in classes other than English, they did not seem to have much preparation for what is referred to as disciplinary literacy or writing within the disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Estrem (2015) contends that disciplines have "particular ways of asking and investigating questions enacted through and demonstrated in writing" (56). That D'Metra separated learning to *write* from the history writing tasks in high school from learning to *think* from the writing tasks in college was a clear sign that for her the writing tasks in history were not at all representative of, and perhaps even ran counter to, the actual literacy practices of the discipline she encountered in college.

To explore the role that learning to write in a discipline played in the transition to writing in college, I will narrate in some depth the contrasting stories of Zarina and Kendra, both of whom took an introductory chemistry class and were required to write numerous lab reports in their first year with very different outcomes. I will also share examples from D'Metra, whose college department actively sought to develop a sense of disciplinary belonging, and Anna's, whose did not, but who found enculturation into her discipline's writing through sources outside the walls of the classroom.

"Not really writing": Zarina's Development as a Thinker and Writer in Chemistry

Zarina, a chemical engineering major, was brought into the conventions and habits of mind of chemistry writing through fairly straightforward means. The first two lab reports of first semester were designed to familiarize her with the format of the document (including sections such as Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) and some of the tools (such as Excel) that she would need to write within the genre. The first report was an exercise in calculations, while the second lab report "wasn't even like a real experiment...we just transferred something to another container and transferred that to a different container, and then we wrote about it." She had been given "guidelines...and example lab reports...and a rubric" which she used to guide her work, such as "'Make sure you include the like, the primary chemical reaction,' so I would just write them down underneath." She drew parallels to her approach to writing in other contexts, noting that she "would start bulleting things and then...go back, very much how [she] would write like an *actual* essay," suggesting the ways in which the writing seemed familiar to her.

She explained that they "drilled [lab report guidelines] into us a few times," but that did not mean she found success right away. On her first report, which was essentially practice in calculations, she got a "30 out of 60" for not having it printed out on the appointed date, and for not having "these calculations in a table, and stuff like that…. It was a lot of like little things, but they built up so much." Zarina contextualized this grade by explaining that "I'm pretty sure a lot of people did badly on this one...it's still bad, but comparatively," trailing off as to suggest her uncertainty. Her initial assessment of what this grade meant or what she learned from this early feedback was focused less on the

text on more on the assessor, as she noted, “Some TAs are really strict and really care.” She certainly did not read the initial low grade as a sign that she was unable to do this kind of work more generally.

In addition to explicit guidelines, specific early feedback, examples, and relatively simple introductory tasks, Zarina reported that she was further introduced to science writing by being presented scaffolded data sets and by being required to do science reading as part of the writing process. Even in her lab reports much later in the semester, she noted that “we’re kind of given what we need, what we need to use versus what’s not,” going on to say that her teaching assistant would explicitly say “‘You’re gonna need this, you’re gonna use this,’” which she found helpful because “sometimes the data doesn’t look like it’s related to what we’re trying to find.” Additionally, although she wrote all her lab reports on her own, she explained that having a lab partner was an important part of the process because “with chemistry it’s very data heavy...and it can take you one way or the other like wildly [so] it’s important to have someone there with you to back you up” or to offer an alternative interpretation of the data.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Zarina found it “validating” to discover that the format that she was being asked to use for her lab reports, which she was fully aware were exercises and not actual experiments, was used in published works. She was required to include three pieces of research, “literally a sentence of research each,” indicating her understanding that the requirement was less about adding depth to her report and more about helping her “see that it was formatted exactly the way we were doing it.” She explained the importance this held for her, noting that “school’s hard, but

you have to lead it toward the career path you want, [and] I think like I just want it to be as realistic as possible."

While Zarina's initial observations about writing in chemistry were focused on understanding the prescribed format and the preferences of the teaching assistant, over the course of the year, she began to uncover "how a writer, or like how scientists have to write their papers" and the last lab report of the first semester "really shed light on how research papers are written, at least, to me it showed me like just because, you're given all this data and then in one separate section you analyze all the data." She recalled the confusion she experienced as she came to terms with the restriction that "you don't define any of the chemistry in the results," noting that she would realize she was "trying to justify [herself] in [her] results and then [she] would be like, 'You're not supposed to do this right here."' She explained that one of her favorite parts of writing is justifying her thinking, which contributed to her difficulty in accepting the genre's restriction to separate the results from the chemistry thinking.

More specifically, she offered two examples over the course of the year that demonstrated not only what she had learned about how chemists wrote, but also what she learned about the values and thinking of chemists *through* the writing that she did. In her first semester, she wrote in a lab report that "'Although the percent errors for this test are relatively large, two of them being greater than 50%' [she] still said 'The experiment was overall a success'" based on her performance of a Q test, which she understood could tell her whether the data were so bad that they needed to be rejected. Her teaching assistant circled '"was overall a success'" and wrote in the margin "Was it though?" which Zarina

found “rude,” but also took to mean that “they don’t really care about the Q test. Percent error weighs more than the Q test.”

In her second semester, she had a similar situation in which an experiment offered the possibility of multiple determination tests, and she and her lab partner initially chose to use the finding from the molar mass to identify an unknown substance. They were not initially aware, however, of the large possibility for error in this test, as opposed to the absorbance wavelength test, which has “hardly any room to go wrong.” From this experience, Zarina began to have a deeper understanding of the need to think through what each aspect of a lab assignment was telling her, what could go wrong with each, and the care she needed to take with “the data you choose to believe in” since any one lab task will have multiple, sometimes conflicting, data sources. “I know what’s more important in the eyes of a chemist now,” Zarina reflected.

Zarina’s growing understanding of the interconnectedness between how a lab report functions as a documentation of scientific thinking her own sense of how to write one became more salient as the tasks became more complicated and data-intensive, culminating in the Cobalt lab second semester, or “every freshman Chem E major’s worst nightmare.” She explained that in early lab reports, she would “start with the intro...and make things up in my results and just go for that,” but particularly on the Cobalt lab, she started with calculations, which she wrote out in a section called *Appendices* (which was not available in the previous semester). This section, which “shows where [she] could to wrong, and like where [she] did go wrong” became the basis for her results section, which she found to be “on par to like, a real research paper, [where] they have to show their like, where they got their results from.”

While Zarina's discussion of learning to write lab reports was certainly steeped in her growing understanding of chemistry and how chemists represent their thinking through writing, she still found herself drawing on the analytical writing processes she had developed and used in AP English in high school. She compared her process in beginning with the results of her lab report (not the first section of the paper) to how she would approach a literary research paper: "I would find the quotes first, I would have my overarching idea, but then I would find the quotes first and then go in and write my stuff...I think it's better to have your data, or your quotes, you support before you go in and do what you want to say." Upon further reflection, she explained that the resources from her senior English class were instrumental in her success in science writing because "you have to be able to be ready to like deeply analyze and deeply understand your thinking, like 'What did I do in that procedure?' You have to see like where things are coming from and you have to be able to connect."

Kendra: "Failure" as Development in Disciplinary Writing

In contrast, after Kendra's first trimester of college, she had already dropped chemistry and had applied to change her major to English in large part because of her inability to take on the writing practices in that class. This is not to say, though, that because she chose not to take on the writing identity of a chemist as Zarina did, that she did not learn a great deal about what it meant to write in different disciplines. In fact, at the end of the school year, her most global reflections were about this very phenomenon.

"In high school," she explained, "I feel like I could have written one master essay, and then popped in any prompt that we were given and turn it in and still get *A*s, but with college I don't think I can do that anymore." Consequently, she considered writing

"assignment by assignment. I don't take a universal approach to my writing anymore. It's more of, what is the assignment asking...There's not a template anymore." Becoming aware demands of the assignment, including in some cases the discipline in which the writing was situated, was an important aspect of development of Kendra's writing process as she moved through her coursework her first year.

Though Kendra mentioned receiving examples and guidelines for writing a lab report, as Zarina did, there were, of course, numerous situational differences between how the two were taught to write in chemistry. Two differences that Kendra brought up as significant included the fact that her ten-week instructional timeline meant that she had a lab report due every week, and that she was taking a second science class, biology, that also required a lab report every week. She noted that these two types of writing, although similar to each other when compared to, say, an essay in English class, were different enough that even "if [she] managed to succeed in writing a chemistry lab report," she could not necessarily "write a really stellar biology lab report. Nope! Like that didn't work out."

From a sociocultural perspective, though, more salient than these circumstances is the reality that Kendra simply did not like the kind of writing she was asked to do for chemistry, and by extension, did not like the kind of thinker chemistry was asking her to become. Contrast this stance with Zarina's statement that she had "fallen in love with chemistry," which allowed her to consider lab reports "not really writing" but still to find ways to become comfortable with participating in their production. When Kendra reached her crisis point in the middle of the semester, she was "feeling really bad" and "was crying," so (in another act of self-direction), she looked up on her laptop: "'What to do in

college if you're not feeling it?" The online source suggested that what she was doing was not her passion and that she needed to be encouraged to follow academically what her passion was—which was *not* chemistry.

Kendra's assessment of the kind of writing expected of her in chemistry lab reports was clear: "that type of writing seemed pointless to me." In particular, she was commenting on the need to state explicitly every step of the methods, despite the methods already being outlined in the experiment directions: "If [the reader] had a handbook," she posited, "they can read it for themselves, and...I'm pretty sure that in the science world, if they're like writing a lab report, then they're gonna have the experiment like attached or something." Though her understanding of "the science world" is certainly that of a novice, it is interesting that she based her assessment on the lab report as an actual social document being read in a real context rather than merely as an exercise. Additionally, she found it "dumb" that she had to "write as if [she] were like...the teacher. Cause [she is] not the teacher, [she is] the student."

She explained that she was more accustomed to interpretive writing in which she states: "'Here are my facts, I'm explaining them, I'm making an argument. You don't have to agree with me, but here it is," which she clearly preferred to the explicit procedural writing which she characterized dismissively as "'Ok, now we're going to like bake a cookie,' the whole cookbook type thing." Much like Zarina noted that chemistry lab reports "aren't really writing," Kendra was dismissive of the genre and its expectations, but without the strong interest in developing the knowledge of chemistry and the identity of chemist, she seemed unable or unwilling to adjust to the new writing expectations.

Unlike Zarina's case, in which she had the benefit of 32 weeks of chemistry writing to develop a sense of why the writing worked the way it did, Kendra was in her chemistry class for only a few weeks. The brevity of the experience notwithstanding, she expressed some understanding of why some of the features of lab report writing functioned the way they did, though she was, again, not particularly impressed with that kind of writing. Stylistically, she came to an understanding that she "had to put a lot of information into really concise sentences," which she found "mind-boggling," and she expressed confusion over wanting to "be sure that anybody could just pick it up and understand it, but you also want to use scientific terms." More specifically, she recalled learning about the need to be specific in her statements of measurements when her mentor pointed out, "'You wanna explain like everything...every single detail because you don't know if that reader has the same supplies.'" As she reasoned out her attitude toward this expectation, she concluded, "but then again, the experiment is supposed to be replicated, but blah, blah, blah," suggesting that she understood the reason for convention, but did not see the value in it.

It might be easy to dismiss Kendra's response to science writing as a failure to learn what it means to participate in a new academic context, but when situated in the larger narrative of her first year, she was actually learning quite a bit about how writing shapes and is shaped by the discipline in which it resides. Just as important, she was learning how the kind of writing helps shape the identity of the writer choosing to engage in that kind of writing, and by extension, as part of her career and *life*. Her rejection of a new writing identity, while perhaps viewed institutionally as a form of failure, can also be read as a sign of development, both for the path that Kendra closed because of her lack of

interest in it and for the awareness of disciplinary difference that seemed to have been generated by this otherwise frustrating process for her.

In her second trimester, Kendra took two English courses that might be considered introductions to the discipline. In both, she read short texts or excerpts and wrote carefully about the language in those texts. In her poetry class the essays were called explications, and in her prose class they were called close readings, but she noticed "as a writer...there were a lot of overlaps in [her] classes." Kendra appreciated the explicit guidelines and student-composed examples that her poetry teacher gave her because they helped her see "the writing they thought was acceptable and also successful." These two classes seem rooted in a *new critical* approach (Richards, 1929), which differed from the Shakespeare course she took the next trimester in which the professor encouraged Kendra to take a *new historical* approach (Greenblatt, 1989) to *The Taming of the Shrew*.

She explained that while they were discussing the play, her professor encouraged them to "'take into account that this is the Renaissance and this relationship is, you know, not feeding into the patriarchy in the sense that, yeah, he's superior but they were all right with that back then,'" an idea that Kendra found "mind blowing" because she and her classmates were "interpreting the play in a modern, contemporary sense," but she was being challenged to "take a step back and put [herself into the perspective of] a Renaissance person of Shakespeare's time." Rather than viewing the contrasting approaches of these two courses, with one positing that the meaning of the text lies completely within its language, and another arguing for meaning that shifts over time because of historical context, as foolishly contradictory (as she did similar differences

between a lab report in chemistry and biology), Kendra seemed delighted to learn of the flexibility of modes of thinking within the discipline of English.

Inspired by her difficult experience with writing an unfamiliar form in chemistry, Kendra "felt like [she] was looking up a lot of, like Googling a lot of 'How to write *blank,*''' including, before her first paper for third trimester philosophy course: "how to write a philosophy essay." From this online source, Kendra became familiar with genre expectations within the discipline that she found "different from another type of essay" because she was to assume the reader had strong background knowledge on the topic (a characteristic she contrasted specifically to her essays for English), and to "present the argument and then present the counter argument and your thesis, how you were going to defend your thesis, and then there were even tinier bullet points for the first argument, the objection to that objection...it was kind of overwhelming." She set up an appointment with her professor, and while she "didn't ask him directly how to write a paper" in philosophy, she found through their conversation validation in what she had learned from the online source, particularly the need for a strong counter argument.

From her instructor, Kendra continued to build a sense of disciplinary expectations, but because of her novice status, she (like Zarina was early on in chemistry) was unsure whether a particular practice was a feature of writing in the discipline or an idiosyncrasy of the teacher (cf Bergman & Zepernick, 2007). Specifically, her philosophy teacher was adamant about concision (a requirement that chafed her when she was writing lab reports), giving her the editing advice to read every sentence and remove any words she could, and to "circle verbs" and replace words such as "asserts" or "argues" with "says" because, based on her understanding a philosopher is "just offering his

teachings, he's not saying they're correct." While Kendra accepted this advice and attempted to integrate it into her sense of what it meant to write in philosophy, she was still left wondering "if that's just because the professor was nitpicky" about those topics.

Discussion of Zarina's and Kendra's Cases

By multiple measures, both Zarina and Kendra were strong writers. Both of them found that the writing required of them in chemistry unsettled their sense of what writing was and, by extension, who they were as writers. Their stories told side by side, particularly in light of the disciplinary development Kendra experienced in English and philosophy (granted, styles that were much more familiar to her than chemistry was), demonstrate the significant degree to which writing and identity are intertwined in the transition to college writing. Furthermore, they complicate notions of what "success" and "failure" mean in the transition to college writing. Lack of skill, even when combined with possible gaps in chemistry knowledge, seems an insufficient explanation for Kendra's difficulty in writing a successful lab report, particularly in terms of the way she described what she found so difficult.

One way to understand Zarina's transition story in chemistry is in light of Reiff and Bawarshi's (2011) concept of *boundary crossing* in that she had to accept that her favorite part of writing, justifying her thoughts and claims, was not "allowed" to be written in the same section as the presentation of her claims, as she was used to in writing she had done in high school English. This genre difference ran strongly counter to her understanding of what writing was, but she persevered, partly because of her adoption of the role of *professional in training*, to use language from Walvoord and McCarthy (1999). And while she had to work consciously to adapt to a written form that asked for

separation of findings and discussion in an unfamiliar way, she still relied on an analytical process from other writing contexts to think through the connection between claims and reasoning. Despite the growth and commitment to continue in chemistry, the language Zarina used to reflect on what she learned about science writing still suggested some distance from the identity, as she framed her learning in terms of what "they" do, and how "chemists" think.

Kendra, on the other hand, seemed uninterested in taking on even the role of *layperson*, a disciplinary outsider, in chemistry (Walvoord & McCarthy, 1999). Kendra's account of her difficulty, though, does not quite suggest that she did not understand the genre expectations, but that she found them distasteful and did not want to participate in them. It is certainly possible that gaps in chemistry knowledge and a rapid writing schedule played roles in her eventual withdrawal from the course and change of major, but her response seems best explained in terms of her lack of desire to participate in the intellectual community of chemistry (Blau, 2006; Carroll, 2000; Durst, 1999).

Kendra's awareness and acceptance of disciplinary conventions in other classes demonstrates that she had interest in participating in an intellectual community through writing, just not the one that will ask her to take on a form of writing that she found unpleasant. But as D'Metra's case will suggest, simply because a student *does* find herself able to meet the writing demands of a particular discipline does not mean she is comfortable becoming a part of the particular disciplinary community—the actual professors and students associated with the literacy practices of that discipline.

Disciplinary Coda: The Role of the Institution in Fostering Disciplinarity

I will conclude this chapter with brief accounts of D'Metra's experiences learning to write in history, which were purposefully facilitated by her department, and of Anna's account of her first experiences with journalistic writing, all of which occurred in a setting outside the classroom. Their experiences provide additional insight into what it means to learn to write in a new discipline in college because the means by which they were introduced to the discipline were so different from Zarina's and Kendra's largely implicit introduction through writing assignments in a specific class.

That D'Metra had developed a strong sense of the interconnectedness between discipline and thinking practices was clear in the second think-aloud when she began to formalize her critique of the author's argument. For contrast's sake, in the high school think-aloud, D'Metra, like most students, based her notion of critique on whether or not she agreed with the author's position. As she considered how to frame her critique after her first year of college, though, she pointed out that "it depends on like the goal of the argument," using disciplinary categories to explain that in "history the goal is to just inform a little bit more," with outright persuasion being tempered by the goal of informing of a perspective. On the other hand, "in politics this would be like 'Ok, how is this affecting us right now?'" with a focus on contemporary application, and in speech communication, the evaluative question would be "'What's your call to action?' Did she want you to sign a petition, stop using 20 dollar bills?"

D'Metra's internalization and application of this distinction is not as important to this study, though, as the way in which she came to these understandings: in the context of a very purposeful social enculturation designed by her institution and her major. By

contrast, neither Zarina nor Kendra reported the experience of someone in their program saying: "Welcome to the discipline of chemistry. Here is what we believe about evidence and discovery and communication: Please join the conversation." That is, however, a rough approximation of the experience D'Metra recounted as she became oriented to the discipline of history at her institution. Marked by explicit attention to disciplinarity and much more social in its approach, her story builds from Zarina's and Kendra's in reinforcing the notion that joining a discipline is an act of identity formation, but it goes further to highlight that joining a discipline is itself not a social abstraction. Rather it is, at least at first, the invitation to join a group of *particular* people in a *particular* location, which comes with sociocultural consequences tied with all aspects of identity, but in D'Metra's case, race.

In her first semester, D'Metra reported taking two history classes: an "actual history class" on American history to the Civil War and an "introduction to the department of history." Though her language seemed at first a bit dismissive, it was clear that D'Metra saw value in the course in which students got an introduction to "the different professors and how they teach" through guest lectures, an explicit rubric for historical thinking which she referred to as "the 5C's of history" (though she could not recall them at the time), and were required to write a course of study in which they assessed their strengths and weaknesses in the field and selected courses for the next few semester and justified their choices. Overall, she credits this class with helping her understand that history is "more than just pulling out facts. You have to know like how this affects like what's going on now, and how it affects stuff that was happening at the

same time, and how it was influenced by stuff before that … in order to make arguments and form opinions."

In her first-year orientation class, D'Metra was required to interview a professor. She took this opportunity to extend her orientation to the field by interviewing her History 100 professor, who also happened to be the head of the department. She explained that through the process, she enjoyed learning that he was "just a regular guy" and she also understood that through the interview, she was getting her "face known to him," letting him know that she was a new student in his department, and his class. D'Metra displayed open pride for her department, noting the range of expertise she saw in the various professors (to whom she was exposed through the class) and positing that "our history discipline is probably the best at our school because it's just, well...historians are so much better than everybody else [laughs]. Like just um about like the way that the kinda go through the thinking process, and they know like the importance of knowing how to analyze and stuff."

That said, when asked if she found anything unattractive about participating in the discipline, her response was not about the content or thinking practices, but about the people, noting that "they definitely have less diversity than I hoped for," echoing her earlier observation that she was the only person of color in her department, which brought her to tears and made her want to "go back home cause [she didn't] feel comfortable." Her university's approach, then, was useful to her in the sense that at seemed all-encompassing and very real. Beyond being taught key analytical habits and planning for her future in the discipline, D'Metra had many opportunities to meet the actual people who *are* the department. Realizing, though, that she was the only person of

color in this discipline at this university was unsettling to her—not enough to diminish her passion for the subject and desire to continue in the field, but enough to make her question what her role in it might be.

If D'Metra's story illustrates how purposefully an institution can orient students to a discipline and its knowledge practices, Anna's case underscores the potential for learning about the connections between writing practices and social roles as woven together through disciplines—here, specifically, journalism—to occur outside of the classroom in unofficial spaces. In pursuit of her interest in journalism, Anna volunteered as a news writer and reader for the college radio station, which required her to "go in an hour before the broadcast and ... choose what [she wanted] to write about" before then reading it on the broadcast. She learned that this kind of writing was "definitely different from writing for reading," recalling specifically feedback she got from a more experienced newsreader after she included the ages of the individuals involved in a story: "the head newscaster afterwards was like 'You don't have to do that, you could maybe talk about one dude's age but then like it's not like you read in the newspaper.'" This bit of advice, shared informally by one student to another, helped Anna understand how her written text needed to vary for the medium, setting the stage for more significant learning about the role of the broadcast journalist as she became more involved in the radio program.

When her school's Democratic organization brought to campus a law enforcement official known for his efforts in prison reform, Anna volunteered to cover the story and produce a "package" for the radio, which she described as a "longer story that you play and record, and it's not live." She did not have any experience with this work, so after

attending the event and gathering all her recordings, she had to learn "really quick how to do all the stuff," including operating the audio editing software, which she managed with the assistance of another student newscaster. In the process, she also met with another student newscaster who, after ascertaining that Anna had not taken any journalism classes, taught her the disciplinary convention of focusing on "'color quotes'" such as if the interviewee expresses emotion or a strong point of view, or in Anna's words, "sound bites you want to use because everything else you can explain as the newscaster." This guidance helped Anna shape the text/recording of the package because it gave her the discipline's language and theory on what "to include from him and what to narrate herself."

Actually producing the story, participating in the process of reporting news, gave Anna much deeper insight into what taking on this role meant and seemed to give her some of the challenge she had been missing in her work in the classroom. As a member of the organization that sponsored the speaker's appearance and as a person who had strong feelings toward the policies he was putting forward, Anna noted that she "definitely realized how easy it is as a reporter to shape the narrative how you want to shape it." Though she strove to be "as objective as possible," in order to do so she had to "kinda step back and realize what is [her] bias here." She realized that as the author of the text that would be broadcast, she could "make [the full recording of the speaker's comments] into whatever [she wanted] it to be," which she noted is "kinda scary … [because she] can literally shape it to be how [she wants] it." Anna found it "humbling" to learn that in her social position as a reporter of news, she can "report facts...it can all be true," but through her choices as a writer, "it can be a different kind of truth."

While D'Metra's and Anna's stories demonstrate how differently students can be enculturated into a discipline—directly by an entire department's official efforts or indirectly by students participating in an extracurricular activity—they work together to underscore the intensely personal and social this work can be. Anna's experience calls attention to the ways in which schools are organized around disciplines, but their structure comes from activity beyond the walls of the academy, where Anna received her much-anticipated first experiences with the work she came to college to do. Her reflections on the work, and the responsibilities of the social role she saw herself on the verge of filling, gave her new exciting perspective on what it would mean to be a journalist. On the other hand, D'Metra, who still professed passion for the work of historians and the abstract concept of her department of history, points out the ways in which racial difference can make participation in a discipline less attractive to some than to others.

Not every student in the study experienced the challenge of writing in unfamiliar disciplinary terrain, but for those who did, it was a significant aspect of their transition. Students, by and large, identified writing with English class and considered a thesis-driven, evidence based interpretive essay to be "writing." Learning that the valued types of writing varies within disciplines, and that those types are not merely forms to be mastered but also reflections of social practices and, in fact, *are* social practices themselves, offered students the chance to see themselves as participants in the world in new, sometimes unsettling, ways.

Zarina's and Kendra's stories illustrate how two skilled and sophisticated writers can both object to a new writing form deeply associated with a particular discipline,

finding the lab report "not really writing" and either choose to adapt herself to it or to reject it. Just as students' choice to be selective in their reading in college can be viewed as their agentive and strategic participation in university culture rather than their "failure" as readers, Kendra's "inability" to take on the form of the chemistry lab report needs to be interpreted as something more complex than failure. D'Metra's emotional response to learning that she was the only student of color in her department calls attention to the specifically situated nature of disciplinarity, as a concept certainly bigger than written forms that live on a page and more real and specific than the abstract notions of disciplines as ways of knowing and communicating knowledge. The students in this study illustrate that development of disciplinary identity in college involves all of these features, but in combinations that are neither uniform nor predictable.

CHAPTER 6

NEGOTIATING NEW AUDIENCES AND WRITING CONTEXTS IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND

Over the course of the three semesters of this project, students conveyed multi-faceted understandings of the concept of audience, including how they used knowledge about their audience as a resource and how the presence of an imagined or real audience caused complications for them (Beck, 2009; Lunsford, 2015). To begin this chapter, I will demonstrate how the eight students in the study offered up three distinct but related ways of thinking about audience that offer insights into their transition from high school to college as writers.

At different points in both high school and college students discussed the audience for their writing as

1. *The general reader*, an abstraction whose needs guided students through the problem-solving process of determining what to write
2. *The teacher-assessor*, a single, knowable entity whose primary concern was the quality of the text itself, the words on the page, and whose goal was to "grade" the work as part of the work of the institution
3. *The personal-ideological reader*, a second way of viewing the *teacher-assessor*, only this time imagined as a reader whose primary concern was not the text itself, but the values and ideologies of the author of the text.

First, I will explain how students understood and used these three concepts both in high school and in college, demonstrating that students had strategic awareness of audience before the transition to college. Then I will turn to the ways in which the contextual and

institutional differences between high school and college, including changes in assignment types and the perception of growing distance between student-writer and teacher-reader, complicated students' understandings. Focusing on Zarina's case, I will then explore those complications in more depth, ultimately arguing that contemporary focus on *the general reader* and *the teacher-assessor* in school-based writing development, while valuable, leaves students to negotiate on their own the complexities of writing for an unfamiliar reader who has a *personal-ideological* identity as well.

In the second half of the chapter, I will discuss a related challenge for students when they found it necessary to write to unfamiliar audiences (or familiar audiences in unfamiliar contexts) in order to advocate for themselves in college. I will suggest that the current focus on academic argument—defined as rational and based almost exclusively on presentation of evidence—as the cornerstone to college success in writing is insufficient and perhaps counterproductive because of the limitations such a focus puts on what high school teachers teach and what high school students learn about writing.

Writing for New Audiences in College

Students' Multiple Conceptions of Audience

Audience as general reader. Carter's notion of audience in high school was largely informed by his experiences writing for the newspaper, for a perhaps obvious reason: this writing had an audience beyond the teacher. He explained that writing for newspaper always had "to capture the attention of the reader," and recalled specifically for his review of *Big Hero 6*, he would "just ad lib things and make the reader feel like they're enjoying what he or she is reading." While he could not necessarily offer specifics around how he wrote to please the audience, he was certain that this sense of

obligation to the reader came from "newspaper class because news articles are always supposed to be really good at capturing people's attention."

In conversations at the end of his first year of college, though, he referred to the needs of a general reader in contexts beyond movie reviews or news articles. He explained that as he wrote in his First-Year Composition 1 course, he would "imagine it being read by other people, common people that would read it in a science magazine" which caused him to "look at it from a different perspective...and realize that someone doesn't sound right to you as the writer," and to ask himself questions such as "'Will people be able to understand this?'" and, "for people who already do understand it, 'Does it sound like something that they would care about?'" He likened this awareness to what he did in some of his graphic design classes, explaining that for a photography class, he had to "set up the image in a way that's interesting to the viewer, and you've gotta know how to take in what light is there...you have to be able to study those kinds of things."

In high school Anna, like Carter, used her sense of the general audience to gauge what might be interesting to a reader, though she was able to explain in more detail how her decisions as a writer are tied to such a concept. She also connected this awareness to her work on the newspaper staff, explaining that her editor would admonish her to "'make this more interesting'" which prompted her to think "'What do people want to read? What is gonna keep them...interested as I go?'" Her examples of such work in practice, though, did not come from newspaper but rather from her in-class essays in AP English, in which she tried "to bring in knowledge from the outside world...almost trying to relate to the reader more." In the initial think-aloud, she also explained that she was going to shape her critique of the article around the organizational pattern of the article

because then “if someone is reading this...they’ll already have the chronology of the essay in their mind, as they’re reading my response to it. So it will almost be like we’re reading it together.” In addition to bridging the gap between writer and reader, Anna felt that such a decision “keeps the reader from getting bored” and “makes the essay deeper, meatier, more interesting.”

D’Metra and Kendra also noted the value of a general reader in their process, with D’Metra explaining that knowing her audience helped her imagine how good a piece had to be. In discussing what makes a piece of writing effective, she explained that “it depends on the audience, because if you’re just writing for yourself, then the standards are definitely different, but if you’re writing for like academics, if they tell you to write about the sky and you write about the ground, okay? [Laughs].” Kendra noted an awareness of a general audience from two different contexts, explaining that when writing an academic argument, she took into consideration a “them” who was an “invisible reader” as she crafted a counter argument to an anti-immigration essay in which she “had to explain...that she wasn’t just a raving lunatic” when expressing an impassioned point. Drawing on her experience as a creative writer, she explained that she refused to make requested revisions to make an implied image more explicit in a vignette she wrote for a literary magazine because of her belief in the need to “trust the reader, y’all!”

Audience as teacher-assessor. While the general audience was a useful tool for students to generate text and assess its effectiveness, there was also wide awareness that the reader for their school-based writing was *not* for a general reader, but was almost exclusively their teacher. Thus, comments such as this one from D’Metra—“I was a little

more comfortable with the second [paper] because I understood it a little more, and I had already wrote for that professor, so I knew what he expected"—are sensible and documented in the literature on the transition to college writing (Bazerman, 2015a; Bergman & Zepernick, 2007; Durst, 1999). In high school, Elijah explained that the evaluation of the teacher was his primary concern in imagining audience. He said that "I'm just gonna write it how I think and then later on I can talk to a teacher...and then they can explain to me and then and see like if it's ok. …. If it's good like the teachers say it's good, then for me, it's fine." Kendra's comments over the course of multiple semesters reflected a somewhat more playful notion of the value of imagining the teacher reader, as she said in her initial think-aloud, "Ooh, now I'm gonna fluff that up [adding the phrase 'Stein says']" then laughed and said "I'm so clever! Ooh, now the professor's gonna be like 'Wow, what an author's voice! [Laughs]." And when she explained her writing process for a paper late in her last trimester, she expressed that she was thinking "I really hope my teacher is gonna be tired when he reads this cause I know I am, writing this!"

In spite of the humorous approach to the teacher-assessor audience Kendra took in those instances, she and other students also recognized that the idea of pleasing a theoretically "knowable" teacher audience is not without complication or frustration. Elijah, for example, was in a high school writing classroom with two teachers. He recalled getting different feedback on the same piece from the two different teachers, "so it just gets confusing and I get stuck and don't know what to do." Kendra had a similar experience in her first trimester (also referenced in Chapter 2) when she realized that although her biology teacher wrote the handbook for the labs, her teaching assistant was

not treating that source as authoritative, leading her to wonder "How are you going to, like co-author this book and then not even care about it?"

Sometimes Kendra also found that the fact that the imagined teacher-assessor is also a real person made it difficult to ask for help. She explained that with her lab reports in chemistry and biology, she wanted to send a draft to her professor for feedback, but because she's a "slow writer" and was writing two lab reports a week, she would often not have a draft ready until "a day before [it] was due…[and she] didn't want them to think [she] had started it last minute [because she] didn't." Though she did not find a way to deal successfully with this tension of interacting with the teacher as assessor in science, she did realize that it was useful to ask her professors in English and philosophy, "Do you guys know what, like have you guys done the reading or are you my professor just reading the essay?" to gain clarity on how explicit to be about the texts under discussion. When her professors explained that she should write as if they read it in high school but have not read it since, she concluded that she should write "like you've never read it."

Audience as personal-ideological reader. While students' notions of audience as a general reader and the specific, knowable teacher-assessor provided both resources and challenges to their composing processes, many students also talked about a third view of an audience that went beyond the quality or understandability of the text or judgment associated with the grade they might receive on a paper. The concept of the audience as a personal-ideological reader who has views on the world that are value-laden, who will make judgments not just of the text itself, but also of the author the text, was perhaps best explained by Kendra's statement in high school that she worried more about sending an

email to a teacher who is the sponsor of a club she participates in than about turning in an essay to a teacher in an academic class.

She explained that when she submitted a paper to her AP English teacher she was "not thinking 'If I give this essay to him, this is what he'll think about me,'" and she imagined that teacher reading her writing with the idea that "'Oh, you were writing this paper and you might have made that mistake because you were up for a while and just hashing it out.'" An email to the club sponsor, where her role was not defined specifically by a teacher-student relationship, has "to be more formal...I don't want to make any weird mistakes. …. Once you send out an email, it's out there...you can't get it back. I feel like there are less penalties with a paper."

Kendra's belief that "mistakes" and "penalties" in writing vary depending on the context suggests her understanding of the significance and potential variety in the relationship between reader and writer. From her point of view, in a student-teacher relationship, the writing is the object of study; outside of those bounds, she herself is potentially what is being judged *through* her writing. Her comment aligns with notions of audience discussed above, in which students' concerns involved an abstract reader's judgment (*Can one understand this text? Is one interested by it?*), or a specific teacher's judgment (*What grade will this paper get?*). Here the concern shifts to matters at once both more general and much more specific and personal. As Kendra put it, there are times when "writing reflects who you are, like it kind of defines you."

D'Metra and Valorous echoed Kendra's belief that what one writes can offer insight into who one is and what one believes and shared the sense of vulnerability this condition creates. D'Metra explained that when she was asked to write a personal

definition essay for rhetoric in high school, she chose the word *Christian* and soon realized that "the hardest part was kind of understanding and rationalizing other people's like views of Christianity" because she was aware of the way their personal conception of the word would influence how she applied it to herself. She acknowledged "this is fine, like everyone is you know entitled to their views" but added that the experience was "an emotional thing because actually talking about how that made me feel and it was hard." With this complexity in mind, she included in her essay "how Christians are portrayed as like bad people who are either trying to send people to hell all the time or are like living double lives and you know all turnt up on Saturday and then when they get to church Sunday, 'Hallelujah!' [Laughs] which I know for some people that's true, but that's just not for everybody." Despite the feelings of discomfort, she used her sense of her audience's ideologically charged notions of Christianity to engage them in her own definition.

Valorous offered an even clearer example of the way in which audience makes judgments about people through their writing when she explained a recent interaction on Twitter. A student from a nearby athletic rival town had tweeted an image of food stamps along with the warning that students from Valorous' school needed to being "'real money'" because "'we won't accept these at the door.'" This tweet made her angry, and when she saw that people she knew and considered friends re-tweeting that tweet, she wondered, "You agree with this? Why am I friends with you?" and concluded that she "learned something new about" them through their implicit endorsement of the racism and classism in the tweet.

Perceptions of the Writer-Reader Relationship in College

While I purposefully drew examples both from students' high school and college experiences to illustrate range of their thinking about audience when they wrote (and read what others wrote), I will now turn attention to students' observations that their understanding of audience *did* in fact change with the transition from high school to college largely because of their relationships with their reading audience. In D'Metra's senior year interview, she explained that she tried to "develop like relationships with a lot of [her] teachers because" she "always [tries] to get good with the person that's grading the papers [Laughs] cause [she will] be like, 'You know what I was thinking [Laughs] when I wrote this.'" In other words, she knew that readers did not always read texts as documents completely separated from the identities of their readers, so she sought to capitalize on the level of human connection that her high school context afforded. In that same interview, she stated that one of her concerns about the transition to college was that it was going to be "a lot more like 'Oh, talk to my assistant' or 'These are my office hours," and that she did not think she was "ready for kinda that umbilical cord to be cut."

After her first semester of college, she indeed found that concern of a new distance to be valid, as she noticed that in "high school it's a lot more personal, like the teachers [in college], yeah, they might want you to learn, but unless you want to get to know them as an individual, they will not really, some of them will not make an effort to get to know you." She went on to explain that it stood out to her that one of her professors *did* learn students' names and would recognize them in multiple contexts on campus, but "the other history professor, he only knew my name and my partner name [and no one else's] in the class for the whole entire semester." Despite being one of the

students that the second professor *did* get to know, she interpreted this phenomenon by stating that "they don't really make the effort" which "makes you not really feel, like if you have a question, you don't really want to go to them because you don't really, you don't know them … but you have to push through that."

She pointed out that "pushing through that" took a variety of forms, and offered the example of reporting an absence in a large lecture class, in which "instead of going to the teacher and be[ing] like 'Hey I'm gonna miss class,'... you go to a person that you never met before." With the understanding that some of these systems were in place to make processes more efficient for the teacher, "as a student," D'Metra asserted, "like if I just lost my grandma, I'm not gonna be thinking about listenin to, talking to this woman that I never even seen before."

More specifically, she noted that she did not think that her teaching assistant for her first year transition class "cared that much," which she clarified she did not mean harshly or as an insult, but rather to explain what she saw as an investment differential between some teachers in college and what she had experienced in high school. Carter offered a related view of what happened to his notion of teacher as audience between high school and college when he noted that "with all the old high school essays, you wrote it in such a way where you were talking to the teacher and you had to make sure that the teacher likes how it sounds, but in college you're basically talking to yourself or other people who think like you." His comment suggests that he saw the college teacher-reader not as distant in a critical way as D'Metra did, but almost transparent, simply elided with a general audience in a way that he did not imagine the high school teacher-reader to be.

While Carter and D'Metra commented on the complexity of interacting with an audience with whom they felt more distance than what they had experienced in high school, Kendra offered a telling counter-example in which she found herself feeling exceptionally close to a particular professor, although the closeness was a construct of her imagination. She referred to her world literature professor as

> "Good old *Tia*" because she was reminding me of a *Tia* or something, like my Aunt. She was Latina too, and she was like part of my family cause she's so adorable but she would just kind of go on and on and I could tell students weren't invested in that class, but I would try to make it, I would raise my hand. Like, "I understand."

Kendra never shared with the teacher that she felt this closeness, but she explained that when she went to this professor with a question about how to approach a particular writing assignment, the professor "was like 'You'll have no trouble writing this cause I know you're a good writer,' you know what I mean? Like 'I don't think you'll have any trouble coming up with a reflection paper,' I was like 'Oh *you*.' [Laughs]. That just strengthened my affection." Kendra's imagined relationship with her teacher, based on shared cultural background and expressed through a metaphor of family and *not* in the language of the institution, underscores the role of student cultural identity as a factor in her writing development for new and unfamiliar audiences.

These examples suggest, first, that students already had and used complex concepts of audience when they wrote in high school and, second, that their conceptions of audience of their school based writing were situated, for the most part, in actual personal relationships with the teacher-reader. Part of the adjustment to writing in

college, then, was coming to terms with the fact that the people who were reading and evaluating their writing were not "imagined" constructs like the general reader, but were real people; they just did not happen to know these people very well (or, in some cases, at all).

Zarina's specific case, to which I turn now, suggests that one of the most significant aspects of adjustment can involve learning to write for an audience the student does not know. Unlike her story of development as a writer in chemistry, in which the challenges of a new situation prompted new strategies and ways of thinking that she found positive and productive, she framed this aspect of her transition in terms of simply learning to accept the discomfort of such situations.

Focal Case (Zarina): "They're reading it and hearing my voice almost, I hope...or else everything is wrong!"

When Zarina was asked to write a parody of Shakespeare's sonnet 118 in her AP English class in her senior year of high school, preserving the structure and rhyme scheme but taking on the topic of her choice, she wrote and read the following aloud to her classmates:

> How have you questioned me? Let me list the ways
> You've questioned me to a length with strength and girth
> I can't explain. From the day of my birth
> Because of the fabric around my face
> I've been questioned foolishly every day
> Most are o.k.. Kind, and gentle, and polite
> I'm asked if I wear it to sleep at night
> I'm asked if I can whip it off in a blaze
> I'm asked if I know random brown men
> Just because they have a large beard on their face
> I'm asked if I have a husband, or ten
> They frighten others, but are imaginary
> Yet the people around me are not zen
> You've questioned me, but so has everybody.

She knew that part of the expectation for the task was that "it was supposed to be funny," but "basically [she] wrote about how like being a Muslim, wearing a headscarf everywhere in public is sort of like hard and people like um often question [her] about it," indicating her willingness to engage in the task in a way that in some ways defied expectations.

Zarina referred to herself as "a visible Muslim in public" and while some students "wrote about ice cream" (Kendra, as a point of comparison, wrote about her affinity for a burrito chain), Zarina chose to use her experiences with being questioned about the signs of her culture and faith as the topic for her poem. And more importantly, she chose to use this school-sanctioned assignment as an opportunity to make a political critique to an audience that she knew included questioners like in the poem: "'Oh, she's talking about us'" was part of Zarina's imagined response from her classmates. Reflecting on this writing task and her choices surrounding it, Zarina noted that

> your words have a power and even though it's just text on paper, they mean something to somebody, especially if not just one person is reading it and I've learned that by, and I think my poetry parody …. when I did read it out loud, like the class was just kind of like "Oh wow, I never realized that we questioned like non typical religions that much, didn't realize how much we stigmatized them." I saw everybody being like, "Oh that was so good, I never thought of that," and at that point I was just like "People pay attention to what you have to say if it's good enough on paper."

In high school, Zarina spoke explicitly about using her interest in politics and her identity as a politically active Muslim woman as a resource for her writing, both in and out of

school. At the time, she did not realize the extent to which her (relatively) close relationship with her teacher and peers made that work feel acceptable, comfortable, or safe.

By way of background, Zarina's father had explained that "she's been wearing her headscarf since childhood" by her own choice and that, from his point of view, it came with a social consequence of "making it difficult for her to find new friends…..but she's more comfortable with that now." He also noted that, in comparison to her three brothers, she is a "straight arrow" in her studies and her writing, "basically doing stuff as per, as instruction." Zarina's words and experience, though, tell a somewhat different story in both of these regards as her choice to wear her headscarf meant she continued to have to negotiate her place in the school social world, in part through written language, and she did so not as a "straight arrow," but with a great deal of skill, creativity, and nuance.

In contrast to some of the other students in the study (notably, D'Metra and Valorous), Zarina explained that she was "not the type to make best friends [with] her teachers" and in fact characterized herself as "forgettable" by most teachers, noting that "most teachers probably don't even know [her] as a person; they just know [her] as somebody who sits there and turns in work. That also wears a headscarf." She did not, however, think of this as a problem; on the contrary, she explained that their role in her life was to teach her, not to be her friend. She conceded that she saw English teachers as unique in that they "actually see how a student thinks" and that she tended "to be more fond of" her English teachers because "the only time [she] comes out in writing is in English class."

As the opening poem makes clear, Zarina was comfortable with using politics as a resource for writing content and for framing a point of view on academic content, whether it was part of the assignment or not. She observed, "Most teachers like when you connect current events to things" and that "it's easy for [her] to write about things if [she's] passionate about it." Her view explained, in part, why for her ORP for AP English she chose to read the novel *Sister of My Heart* and her "thesis was about the feminism wave" which allowed her to read the book to "find ways like 'Oh, this is really, like misogynistic! I could write about this.'" Other writing, though certainly not all of it, took a similarly sociopolitical stance, such as her parody of the style of Don DeLillo in which she addressed how "a lot of Americans tend to judge people based on their level of English" which "bothers [her] because [her] parents [who immigrated from Indonesia] have accents."

Her interest in expressing a sociopolitical identity through writing was not limited to school-based assignments, though, as in her initial interview she also talked at length about her writing on Twitter. She explained that she "tweets a lot about social injustice" with the aim of educating people who "assume like racism is not an issue we have to deal with...to bring a perspective that people don't normally consider." Importantly, at the time of the interview, however, her transition to college was already having an effect on this aspect of her writing life. Because she had not yet been accepted to college, she had "been sorta mum on Twitter" and was "afraid they'll find [her] and be like 'I don't like that she said that.'" Beyond the typical concern a prospective student might feel at publishing personal information on the Internet, Zarina's fear was informed by a well-publicized case of the revocation of a job offer of a faculty member for expressing

unpopular political views at the same university, a clear lesson in the consequences of the written word made public.

Despite believing that she was not close to teachers in high school, Zarina discovered a much bigger gap could and did exist in college, and the effect of that gap had, from her point of view, unexpected effects on what and how she wrote. At various points in both end-of-semester college interviews, Zarina made note of new feelings of distance between her and her college instructors, contrasting her relationships with them to those she had with her high school teachers, who "even if [she] wasn't super close to them, they like knew [her], they knew [her] name, they knew [her] face, they knew who [she] was." She went on to say that even if she did not have particularly close relationships with high school teachers, they "would still spend a year with [her], and in college it's literally like [they're] with [her] for literally like 16 weeks, and then [they're] gone. They don't, we're not trying to be nice to each other because there's really no need."

The first result of this new perceived distance between herself and her teacher-reader was a decrease in investment in the act of writing. As Zarina explained, she realized that she put "more effort into [her] writing if [she] likes the person reading it," and, it would seem, if she believes the person reading it has some reason to like (or at least *know*) her. Her teaching assistant for chemistry and her intern for a first-year orientation class did not "really know [her]" and, she realized, they are both college students with busy lives of their own, so "they have so much other stuff to do" that she did not believe they "put much effort into reading [her] stuff, [so she was] not going to put much effort into writing" in return.

Similarly, in her online Arab culture class, in which the lecturer was not even the person who read the student paper for the course, "there's like a disconnect, and it makes [her] lazy in [her] writing." Zarina knew "she is like only the grader, so she's reading like 30 essays from like all these kids, so that makes [her] like 'I know she's probably not going to read this stuff really, I'm just going to type in whatever.'" She noted that most of the time in situations such as this, she was "just writing to meet the word count," a behavior that she explained "just like hurts my heart." Zarina offered this particularly poignant assessment of the emotional effect the distance between reader and writer had on her: "It's not like they're reading it without my name, they're reading it and hearing my voice almost, I guess. I hope...or else everything is wrong," followed by knowing and nervous laughter.

The distance between author and reader made Zarina question what she thought she knew about the social relationships embedded in school-based writing and, consequently, to disengage her from the process. Just as vexing for her was the difficulty the distance between author and reader created for her in knowing how much she had to say to provide context for a particularly sensitive topic, or, indeed, what she *can* say, given the limited amount of actual relationship contextualizing the writing. In her first-year orientation class, Zarina was asked to write about politically sensitive topics, including a reflection on what she learned about diversity in her first semester at the university and reflections on different political/cultural events around the campus.

As she was writing her reflection on diversity, she felt uncomfortable writing "'As a Muslim woman of color in America…' and like explain[ing] [her] entire

background." She preferred instead the shorthand that existed when author and reader know each other personally, as it did for her in high school because

> like they would see my name and they would get where I'm coming from, they would be like "Oh, I understand her perspective because I know who she is" but this, it was just a lot of effort just sitting there being like, "Yes, my family is, they're immigrants. Therefore, diversity is important to me." I was like, it was all just really like repetitive, and I couldn't go deeper because I was like, then it would be too much I guess.

Zarina contextualized her struggle in the college setting by contrasting it to the ease of writing politically in high school, noting that she "had so much fun doing that, and I didn't have to sit there and be like 'Because I am a woman in America, and like a person of color, I can immediately relate to this and like it actually affects me' and stuff like that" because of the ongoing relationship with the teacher and the discussions they have had as a class, "it's almost implied." Importantly, Zarina recognized the need to provide additional context, but did not necessarily feel the investment was worth her effort given the nature of the assignment and her relationship with the reader.

She also found herself unable to "go deeper" into sensitive topics in her first-year orientation class because she was unsure of the political viewpoints of the reader. Zarina admitted to engaging in stereotyping herself when she recalled this writing task, noting that "just the way [the teaching assistant] comes off in class, he comes off as sort of like, … a privileged White boy, and I don't think he would understand the struggles that people of color, like specifically black people would face in this country," underscoring her observation that given such a short time to get to know her teacher, she found herself

having to rely on superficial cues such as race and gender to read her audience. “I didn't have a relationship with the person I was writing for,” she noted, “that [would make] me feel comfortable with writing whatever I wanted.”

This discomfort she felt was limited to topics of a political sort, as Zarina pointed out that in the orientation class, “the first paper was just like my time management … like, so dry and impersonal” but just a few weeks later she was asked to reflect on a session on police brutality in the community and later reflect on her changing viewpoints about diversity. She explained that these feelings did not arise in chemistry where “there's not a lot of wiggle room there, you're just told what to do and you do it.” Also important is the directly political nature of the writing requested by the teacher in this situation. While Zarina had written from a political standpoint in high school, she did so by her own choice in response to more traditionally “academic” prompts. In this case, the prompt itself framed the writer-reader relationship as political and ideological, though from Zarina’s point of view, it was presented as if it were akin to the reflection on time management.

While Zarina found the transition to college to be a confusing time in terms of expressing her political views inside the classroom, she was no longer concerned about college admission officials seeing her online opinions, and she found herself becoming more and more comfortable taking stances on social issues in the writing space afforded by her Twitter account. At first she attributed her increasing involvement in online conversations as a function of her audience growing, but she later explained that she started following people with similarly politically aware stances and that “Twitter is a different space for me now...it’s almost like I might be more credible now just because I

have started tweeting about these things, so once I started doing that, people saw my tweets and would be like, 'Oh yeah, she might actually have something useful to say."

She explained that she felt that social media "is very powerful nowadays" and that she uses it as a "space to mainly like complain about things that other people don't really see," such as the struggles she faces because of her religious identity as a Muslim woman in the western world. She offered as an example a time when she called into account former high school classmates for speaking on behalf of Muslims, tweeting that "You know, sometimes it's better to listen to what 'real live Muslims' have to say about Islamophobia instead of tweeting repeated stereotypes" and "These white allies keep getting praised for saying things we've been saying since day one, and it's embarrassing" not to him, but about him, with the hopes that her followers would understand her target. She also tried to raise awareness of the media's differential treatment of mass murderers of color as opposed to whites, pointing out instances in which criminals of color had their privacy violated in ways that she had never seen occur to a white criminal.

Discussion of Responses to the Shifting Relationships between Reader and Writer

Even in high school, students in this study showed sophisticated awareness of the ways writing mediates relationships between readers and writers. What they were unaccustomed to, however, were situations in which writing seemed to be the *only* avenue mediating relationships with readers. In other words, they had relied on the familiarity generated by the duration and frequency of contact in the high school setting, as well as the perception that their teachers knew them well and cared about them, as a resource for writing: as a form of idea short-hand, a source of comfort, and a type of motivation. D'Metra specifically called attention to the relationships she formed with

teachers in high school and accurately predicted that relationships with teachers (and, thus, readers) would not be as tight-knit in college[8]. Zarina, on the other hand, found the distance a surprise since she thought her relationships with teachers in high school were already marked by a certain professional aloofness. In response to the shock of feeling that her readers did not care for her, or *knowing it* because sometimes the readers truly knew nothing about her except for the text that she wrote, she found herself disheartened by feeling she was approaching writing merely to complete an assignment.

Kendra's imagined relationship with her Professor *Tia* points out students' interest in forming these sorts of relationships, even for a student who met with other professors quite regularly to discuss her writing. Zarina's re-ignited interest in posting on Twitter suggests her move to an online space for writing that felt more real, more embedded in relationships than she was finding in her first year of college writing.

Despite the focus on the literature about college-level writing being defined by participating in new conversations (Blau, 2010; Kearnes, 2006; Sullivan, 2006), a clear adjustment some students in this study experienced was feeling as if they were talking to a stranger and were, thus, not viewing the exchange as much of a conversation at all. While the metaphorical nature of "writing as conversation" is clear, students in this study point out that the contextual change in student-teacher relationships between high school and college was, in some cases, a block to the attitudinal shift that the field associates with writing in college[9].

[8] D'Metra's meeting with the history professor who wrote the book she did not read might be seen as an attempt to generate some of this personal connection, in addition to verifying if he could detect that she had not read.

[9] Not all students felt this way. Carter, for example, offers a perfect example of this phenomenon when he imagined his writing being responded to by another writer. See Chapter 4.

Unlike writing in a new discipline, which also caused feelings of disorientation and discomfort, writing for an unfamiliar audience did not spur new understandings or strategies as disciplinary writing did. What happened to Zarina seems similar to what Toni Morrison describes in her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) when the narrator Claudia recounts her path from revulsion to love of white culture, symbolized by pale-skinned babydolls and Shirley Temple, asserting that "the change was adjustment without improvement" (p. 23). Students got used to the condition ("pushed through," as D'Metra put it), but did not necessarily learn from the experience, except perhaps, in hindsight, how powerfully social writing was, even if they had not realized it at the time.

Writing as Self-Advocacy in College

In the previous section, I examined the ways in which students cited the adjustment to writing (primarily) classroom-based assignments for an unfamiliar audience as a significant aspect of their transition. Students had to adapt their understanding of the way in which writing mediates a relationship with a known teacher-reader to relationships with others who are less familiar, but the *context* of the writing task—completing an assigned piece of writing for a grade in a class—was not new. For some students, though, a significant aspect of their transition to college level writing was not about the texts they wrote for class explicitly, or at all, but rather about writing to advocate for themselves within the institution of college.

Russell (2015) points out the varied ways writing mediates human activity, including situations that are "conflictual" (p. 26). While his examples conceptualize conflict in terms of court proceedings and war documents, writing to self-advocate in college is also conflictual in that it involves the student asserting his or her sense of

correctness or rightness against that of the teacher or institution. It also varies from most other writing in this study because it is initiated by the student, not the teacher, another way in which it might be viewed as conflictual, or at least disruptive, within the accustomed relationship students have with teachers and writing.

Perhaps because of the element of conflict inherent in writing to self-advocate, this kind of writing also differs from most writing in college because it takes on a more explicitly ethical dimension in which writers need to consider new elements of their relationship with the reader. Duffy (2015) explains that a writer hoping to persuade an audience (as one does in writing to self-advocate), "may write in ways that privilege honesty, fairness, and accountability" based on the writer's desire to imply "attitudes of respectfulness, open-mindedness, goodwill, [and] perhaps humility" to his or her audience (p. 32).

In this section, I will establish that some students already had self-advocacy stories as part of their experience in navigating school before sharing the ways that students advocated for themselves both with and about their writing. Then I will turn to an extended example of Calvin, who found himself having to write a letter to his college's financial aid review panel. All the while, I will call attention to students' sense of strategy in their work to engage an audience in potentially conflict-generating advocacy work and establish the source of students' knowledge of such rhetorical and ethical strategy.

Students' Prior Experiences with Self-Advocacy

Three of the students expressed that they had experience with advocating for themselves, not always in writing, and not always within an institutional setting, but their

stories set the stage for the advocacy work they and other students did as they made their ways through the first year of college.

I will open and close this section with Calvin, whose story is by far the anomaly in this project, here because the stakes of his advocacy work differ so much from the other participants in the project. He eventually found himself writing a letter to the financial aid appeal board at his college to request reinstatement of aid after withdrawing in the second semester. As he was writing a draft of that letter in our final interview (at his suggestion) he explained, "I'm not very great at advocating for myself, at least not on paper," a lesson he said he learned while at a Boys State event in the summer of his junior year of high school.

He had successfully campaigned for a number of offices at Boys State, and was eventually nominated candidate for his party's version of the presidency. He delivered as his speech a poem from the documentary *Louder Than a Bomb*, but he did not announce that he was not the author of the poem. He reasoned that he had seen "kids doing songs and everything and they [were] not citing it but it was just kind of knowing…it's kind of like a cover type thing." Word got out, however, that he did not write what he had read, and things "just completely blew up." He recounted feeling rejected and bullied by many of the other boys and even some of the counselors.

He was still running for office, though, and had to give a speech against the other remaining candidate before the final election. The Boys State tradition is to give the same speech to both parties as had been delivered to the candidate's own party, but "that would have been received very badly" for obvious reasons, so a counselor gave him advice on how to approach the situation, which Calvin recounted as "'You want to be apologetic,

even if you don't feel like you really have anything to apologize for.'" As Calvin wrote the appeal letter requesting that he be re-considered for financial aid (discussed further at the end of this chapter), he explained that he was drawing on memories of this advice of writing that conciliatory speech and that "I feel like I have to prove myself to people just normally, but it's like writing I haven't really done anything where I've had to prove myself necessarily since then."

Calvin was not alone in feeling that he had to "prove himself to people just normally" in high school. D'Metra, for example, recounted the time that she transferred to a neighboring school district between her 8th and 9th grade years. She had been in honors math and English classes in 8th grade, and was surprised to find herself placed in regular track classes at her new school, and a special support class for English and math. Knowing that this placement was inaccurate and noting that it "really hurt [her] feelings," she approached her counselor and explained that she was not supposed to be in those classes.

She had already taken algebra and had studied the content being addressed in the English class. She cited to multiple sources of authority, indicating to her counselor that her support class teachers felt she was misplaced and offering "'if you want I can tell my mom and she can get the transcripts, y'all can call over there, y'all can you know talk to whoever.'" The counselor was not responsive. D'Metra attributed the lack of response, in part, to her counselor being overwhelmed and "just not good," but ultimately concluded that the cause of this unsuccessful self-advocacy within a school institution was because of her race. "Maybe she was preoccupied," she explained, "but honestly I think it was because I was black."

Elijah, who moved to the United States from Gabon when he was in 8th grade, explained in that in high school he felt he had to stand up for himself not only because of peer perceptions of his race, but also his cultural origin and language background. As he explained his views on why he thought learning to write in school is (or is not) important, he shared that "right now a lot of people gonna make you down because of the way you talk" laying the ground for them to declare that "'You're not educated.'" From his point of view, learning to write in school-sanctioned ways allowed him to say back, "'I'm educated too,'" and counter the beliefs that some hold that "you're not really educated when you're in Africa...like you when you're in Africa spend your day walking around with lions or anything." "It's like, I'm not stupid," he re-iterated. "I'm going to school when I was in Africa so I need to show you here that I'm not stupid, no matter what."

Connections between Writing and Self-Advocacy in College

Elijah's comments, while rooted in his past experiences, turned out to be unfortunately relevant to a crucial aspect of his transition to college: placement in his first-year writing class. Elijah explained that when he went to his college to take the required placement tests, the testing staff asked if he was bilingual. He explained that he did speak French at home, and the officials began the testing process for him as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student. He did not immediately recognize this was happening, but after realizing he never took a placement test for math, which he knew was part of the standard placement test process, he went to his counselor and explained that he was "done with ESL" and "had been in the U.S. for five years," so he implored them to "check [his] transcript" to verify his claims. He knew that entering the ESL track was "literally like different," and he feared he would "probably be in classrooms with

like people that actually just got here, learning English or something. And I'm like not doing this again."

His self-advocacy was successful in avoiding automatic placement in ESL classes, but his concern about being judged as unintelligent or inadequate because of his language skills continued to play out in his placement process. He took the tests for native English speakers, including the math assessment that had been missing in the initial battery of assessments. When he got his scores back, he learned that his scores in many areas of math and reading were high enough to place him in credit-bearing classes (well beyond entry level in the case of math), but he was placed in a non-credit bearing developmental writing class because his "grammar was a little bit low." Because I do not have access to his scores and could not gain complete clarity on placement procedures at his institution (despite some effort to do the latter), I will offer Elijah's perspective on what happened with the caveat that it may represent misunderstanding of the college's policies.

His understanding was that a score of a 90 on the grammar portion of the English test was required for placement in credit-bearing first-year composition, and he scored "in the 80s." While he concurs that developmental English may have been an appropriate placement, his counselor informed him that placement in developmental English also required placement in developmental math, despite his much stronger math scores and success in pre-calculus in high school. He did not argue against this policy, considering a sufficient victory having avoided placement in ESL classes, but as a consequence, spent his first semester completing entirely non-credit bearing coursework.

Building from Elijah's example, which took place before the school year even started and outside the confines of a particular course or relationship with a teacher, I will share other examples of student self-advocacy, organized around students who advocated in writing *about* their class-based writing and students who advocated for themselves *with* their class-based writing.

Self-advocacy about writing. Kendra's experiences in her introductory chemistry class and an urban culture class illustrate a more practical means of self-advocacy, specifically advocating for a higher grade. She explained that in her first trimester she "fought a lot for [her] grades...which was nice" to contest writing assignments that she believed were assessed unfairly. Kendra pointed out that she did not communicate with high school teachers to challenge grades on her writing because she "wasn't confident enough," and she assumed that it was her writing, not the teachers' judgment of it, that was at issue. In some classes her first trimester, though, she "knew that [she] was writing well, not enough to get like low *B*s that [she] had gotten on some of the assignments." This sense of confidence was contextual, though, as demonstrated by the different approach she took for advocating in chemistry, a class in which she "didn't necessarily feel as confident" about her knowledge of the material or how to write about it, and the urban culture class, where she "knew what [she] was talking about."

When she got back her first lab report in chemistry, she went to her teaching assistant to point out that the feedback she had given her contradicted the expectations outlined in the handbook, which she had used to work through this unfamiliar writing task. She pointed out that in the conversation she was purposefully "posing things as a question rather than like accusing her," demonstrating a level of strategy and control that

she exhibited throughout her advocacy processes. Through the conversation it became clear to her that it was likely that the teaching assistant was actually not familiar with the expectations set forth in the handbook, a required text for the course, co-authored by the professor for the class. “You haven't even read the handbook! I caught you!” was her representation of her thoughts at the moment, though she withheld the accusation in the actual conversation.

Like the other students who self-advocated, Kendra provided evidence of her correctness on the position, showing her the expectation from the handbook, to which the teaching assistant responded, “‘Oh, that’s different from what I would have done.’” Finding the evidence insufficiently convincing and being unwilling to broach the problem of the teaching assistant’s lack of familiarity with the expectations set forth in the handbook, Kendra decided not to pursue this issue further, reasoning that that teaching assistant “see[s] it differently from what the handbook is telling [her]. You want flowers, they want, like nothing. [Laughs], So I’ll give you flowers.”

In contrast, when she got a grade lower than she expected in the urban culture class, in which she “knew what [she] had written was really good,” she was more persistent and consciously strategic in her self-advocacy work. As she reflected on the email exchanges in which she asked her teacher to review work for a higher grade, Kendra identified several strategies she used to achieve her goal, noting that “I knew what I wanted to say, and I knew how I wanted to say it,” sharing that upon reflection, she remembered from high school psychology that is it useful to use “I statements” to make it seem like the other person is “not the problem” and that she is “completely willing to do whatever is necessary.”

First, she indicated that her work was to "kinda like persuade them a little bit," so she would avoid accusations, apologize for the email and the question itself, frame her concerns as questions, and make it clear that she was willing to do work requested of her. This strategy work was complemented by a self-conscious sense of power that she felt in the interaction, evidenced both by the "fake sinister laugh" she inserted after telling me that she would review emails before sending them to make any potentially accusatory sentences were framed as questions, and by her belief that she was "kissing butt" when she concluded with lines such as "Thank you, have a good evening."

Central to her persuasive work, though, was the presentation of evidence to counter the evaluations her teacher had made. She explained that in one email she "would explain to her how, 'Yeah, I had included how French artists influenced [The City], and that's shown...with this sentence that I included from my work,'" and on another occasion she recalled writing "'I noticed that you wanted me to point out like these examples and I would like to make it known that I did when I mentioned the train system in this sentence' and then [she] copied and pasted that exact sentence." Even with the presentation of evidence, though, Kendra explained that she was careful to stay true to her strategy and asked "'Should I have elaborated more...or would you have like to have seen that rather than me talking about [another topic in her paper]?'"

Self-advocacy *with* school-based writing. In addition to participating in acts of self-advocacy with writing *about* their writing, as Kendra did, three other students in the study advocated for themselves with the actual written pieces they submitted to their teachers. On the first day of Valorous' First-Year Composition 2 class, students entered the room, sat down at computers, and were asked to choose a topic provided by the

teacher and write in response to it "for him to see like what kind of writers we were like." Although the teacher explained that this writing was not for a grade, Valorous became "really nervous" and "almost started crying" when all she could hear was "everyone on typing on their keyboards," and she could not think of something to write about. So instead remaining stuck after "typing stuff and then deleting it again and again," she chose to write about how she "was feeling in that moment…[so he] knew where [she] was coming from" as a student and a writer. While neither she nor her teacher ever talked about what she wrote, Valorous felt that her writing helped her teacher understand her and explained why he checked in with her from time to time, offering encouragement on her writing.

If Valorous' example illustrates advocacy borne out of self-doubt, Anna and D'Metra offer examples more similar to Kendra's in their assertion of confidence as writers. Anna had submitted the first section of a required draft of a paper in her history class and received feedback from the professor, who apparently expected to see a whole draft that included a full outline for how she might complete the assignment. She explained that she was "a little bit mad, a little hurt that like 'You think I don't know what I'm doing?' Like, come on professor!'" She considered responding to him to explain herself, but since the outline he recommended did not correspond to the plan she had for completing the assignment, she opted instead just to submit the completed draft following her plan without any further communication.

D'Metra similarly felt offended by feedback from a teacher when she submitted what she believed to be what she had been asked for in the research notes for her first genre experiment in first-year composition. She submitted a document with the URL for

web sites she consulted with a brief note about how she had used each source and received what she perceived to be a low grade (she later recalled it was probably an A minus). "'All right, [Professor], let's think about this,'" she recalled thinking. "'Why did you have to do that?' I was just really confused." With only semi-feigned indignation, she went on to explain that for the next research notes she submitted a full annotated bibliography "since you really wanna know." The annotated bibliography was a genre she had learned about and written in her senior English class, and she reported that her professor seemed "really happy" with it, but more importantly, from her point of view, she had achieved her goal of letting her professor know that "[she] knows what [she's] doing."

While D'Metra drew explicitly on a writing resource she had been taught in high school to persuade her teacher that she knew how to compose research notes and Kendra recalled a bit of high school psychology as perhaps being at play in the emails she wrote to her urban culture teacher, none of the students who reported advocating for themselves through writing or other means recalled being explicitly taught how to do so. In fact, the writing students did their senior year and interviews with their chosen influential teachers suggest that this kind of writing, both in purpose and approach, is not considered part of the preparation for college writing.

Teachers' Views on Writing to Convince

The overwhelming notion teachers in this study held of what college-preparatory writing is and should be was teacher-assigned, analytical and evidence-based, usually about text, and for the most part, literary. Largely because of the strong assessment focus of the Advanced Placement program, the class with the most limited notion of what

counted as argumentative writing was the AP literature class, which Mr. Stevens explained as focused exclusively on "insightful interpretation of literature [that asks] them to use text specifically." Throughout the interview, he stressed a theory of persuasiveness built on having "multiple pieces of evidence that point to the same argument," noting that this work "is all about being more convincing." Similarly limited was the notion of audience in the AP class. Aside from the satire pieces that Zarina recalled being read aloud, the audience for student writing was the teacher, with the additional implied audience of "the AP readers," who, he noted, "treat [student writing] the same way" he did. This stance is nearly identical to the Samuelson's (2009) discussion of the confluence in language between teachers and the AP readers, all of whom are trained on College Board rubrics, published and distributed to establish the standards of quality for essays on the exams. Mr. Stevens was confident that lessons about argument, voice, and tone "transfer to other places all the time," and while the students who took AP agreed that it taught them to use plenty of (textual) evidence in their arguments, there seemed to be little connection to writing with a more authentic, persuasive purpose.

Teachers of the senior rhetoric class, both of whom were included in the project, suggested similar notions of what college preparatory writing is, stressing the need for focus, organization, and support, but making little to no mention of audience. Of the assignments for the class that are more personal and open in nature, Mr. Braun suggested "I don't think that's college writing, I just don't," but Ms. Streep felt they developed flexibility and openness in writers. Mr. Braun did not mention audience concerns at all,

and Ms. Streep suggested a writer's obligation to a reader is to make them "want to see [their writing]."

Throughout the interviews, multiple teachers did mention other indicators of successful college writing such as sophistication, voice, and engagement, but certainly the consensus was that the basis for college writing was teacher-assigned analytical argument with a reader who was being asked merely to consider a position but was not being persuaded to change his or her mind or convinced of something consequential. Their views bring to life Bomer's (2013) critique of school curricula based on CCSS writing standards that "never get very close to the actual social work of convincing others or negotiating; they remain stuck at the testable behaviors of citing textual evidence, without the motivating and meaning-making context of actually sharing" (p. 26).

I offer these comments from teachers not to critique their practice (the CCSS and their assessments actually call for a nearly exclusive focus on evidence-based argument and decontextualized single-audience writing tasks), but rather to offer context for students' approaches to writing of a very different sort. Students had been taught that presentation of evidence is sufficient for making an argument because the nature of the writing tasks assumed a neutral, value-free world for writing in which rationality and reasonableness are the only ways an argument was judged.

In contrast, the content focus of Valorous' First-Year Composition 2 class took as its explicit focus "how to like write everything to persuade people" with clear attention to the human aspect of audience and written communication, in ways very similar to how Kendra described her process. While much of the course focused on writing a research paper on a career choice (framed as a report to students persuading them to weigh the

benefits and drawbacks of the career), earlier assignments had students using the acronym *PAIBOC*, standing for purpose, audience, information, benefits, objections, and context. Students wrote, for example, a fictional email to a professor requesting a letter of recommendation, and Valorous recalled strategic thinking such as considering how to convince the professor of benefits such as "'Oh, you're helping me'" and "buttering him up" by including compliments on his teaching. In other words, students were given language and tools for thinking about the very concepts of inter-personal persuasion that Duffy (2015) identifies and Bomer (2013) cites the lack of in contemporary school-based writing instruction, offering a clear model for how the work of arguing beyond the purely rational can be framed in an academic writing class.

Focal Case (Calvin): Advocating for Financial Aid

At our closing interview at the end of second semester, Calvin disclosed to me that I was one of only a handful of people that knew what happened to him, a story that brings into sharp focus the role that financial trouble can play in the transition to college, particularly for first-generation college students of color (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013). Calvin began the conversation with similar language as his reflection on his first semester, sharing that it had "been a rough one. It's been very difficult as far as the schooling in general kind of. So I don't have a lot of material because I almost, I basically withdrew from everything."

Living on his own and without health insurance, Calvin got sick in late January and could not seek medical care. Instead, he had to "rest it off," causing him to miss several days of class, prompting him to email his teachers to ask, "'Hey can I come back?' and they just suggested 'I think you should withdraw from the class cause you've

missed so much.'" He did withdraw, and as a consequence, lost eligibility for financial aid, on which he was completely dependent as a nineteen year old putting himself through college.

Wearing eyeglasses being precariously held together by masking tape, Calvin began to draft his letter to the financial aid appeal letter and identified the significance of his situation both institutionally and personally. To his knowledge, a student can be re-approved for financial aid only once, so it was important that this letter achieve its goal because he knew the stakes were high. Before he began writing, he explained that his counselors had encouraged him to write the appeal letter now rather than waiting for another opportunity because he had shown "a lot of promise" by placing into the honors first-year composition program because that suggests he "has what it takes, it's just a matter of applying [himself]," an assessment that again echoes what he said about his first semester.

As he was writing his appeal letter, the first paragraph of which reprinted as he typed it below (see Appendix C for the remainder of the letter), I asked him to stop occasionally and share what he was doing and why to gain a sense of what he thought it meant to write to advocate for himself:

> When I look back on life, I think to myself "What happened?" "Where did it all go wrong?" "What would people say?". Since I was born, i was caught in a crossfire of expectations. My grandmother who believed I could strive in a predominantly white school, And my biological mother who believed I'd be a pro by learning how to hustle on the streets. Black kids at school asking me "Why do you sound white?" white peers saying "You're white on the inside, and black on

> the outside, like an oreo". I never felt like I was good enough. I found myself constantly pushing to prove myself to each and everyone I met. Proclaiming that despite my life circumstances, despite everything i've been through, I could still conquer and succeed. I felt like a household name, a staple to be placed in a hall of fame someday, because I did it all.

Calvin noted that a challenge in writing this letter was the lack of evidence to support his central claim that the cause of his absence was that he was ill. He explained that he had no way of "proving [his] illness, because [he] didn't get to go to a doctor." "I guess I could prove that I don't have insurance," he explained, "but that's gonna be something that's difficult about trying to prove, to see if they believe me." So, he relied on a number of other resources to try to convince the audience.

He explained that he began the letter with the observation that "'All my life, god, all my life I've wanted to make a change'" in an attempt to "start out where it's like personal [and] to really like touch the reader to make them like see kind of like not necessarily my point of view but like give them a little background about who I am and why I think the way I do." He shared that he had some significant background knowledge of the people who would be reading the letter, a group of twelve people who he imagined as older, who had "come across a lot of these," and are skeptical of students who just "messed up...and need more money." He consciously chose a genre and structure for his letter, indicating that when he wrote "'When I look back,'" he was "showing growth or like departure from where I once was and I [creating] this narrative where I start out in a kind of bleak place and it grows to something that's confident, and I can do this. This is not my fault."

At this point, he noted his lack of skill at advocating for himself in writing and our conversation turned to his story of writing the conciliatory speech for Boys State, narrated earlier in this section. In fact, though, Calvin did seem fairly skilled at advocating for himself, both because of the strategic, audience-oriented moves he identified, and his development of ethos as a student who approached multiple sources of conflict with determination, his use of metaphor to suggest his sense of disappointment in himself and his circumstances, and his overall state of self-awareness.

Our interview ended with this much of his letter completed. We met again in the summer for lunch and to give him time and space to continue the letter. He wrote about a page more, but did not finish the letter or appeal to the board.

Discussion of Student Self-Advocacy Writing

Writing for self-advocacy asked students to re-imagine, again, the writing situation as part of their transition to college. Because they were writing in a way that had the potential to disrupt the typical power dynamic of school-based writing, they had to assert their own authority without challenging that of the audience (Alsup & Bernard-Donals, 2002; Andrews & Smith, 2011; Bazerman, 2015a). In order to do so, students presented evidence (such as transcript records or lines from a graded text), expressed concern over the lack of evidence (Calvin wished he had proof he had been sick), or decided to withhold potentially embarrassing evidence (Kendra did not accuse her TA of not having read the lab report guide) as they developed their self-advocacy writing. But they also knew that they could not simply present evidence on its own. They had to adopt "language that will persuade the powerful" (Andrews & Smith, 2011, p. 132), which

included moves, both sincere and merely performed, that acknowledged their sense of the unbalanced power dynamic.

These moves included positioning oneself as subordinate through questioning and indicating that the responsibility for continued improvement rested with the writer, as Kendra did, and connecting personally with the audience or "touch[ing] the reader" as Calvin did. In cases in which the vulnerability was more genuine, as was the case with Calvin's letter to the financial aid review board and Valorous's re-purposed introductory essay, those attempts at connections seemed more sincere. In other cases, students were up front in their attempts to manufacture a connection through "kissing butt" or "buttering them up," to quote Kendra and Valorous.

Calvin's letter and all of the student examples of self-advocacy should challenge the centrality of the question, "What is college-level writing?" and reframe the inquiry, at least in part, as "What is college-*context* writing?" These students' experiences suggest that in addition to being equipped with the skills to write well-reasoned, evidence-based arguments about purely academic topics, they needed (and largely had) resources to address an audience with power with a request for a specific, self-interested outcome.

Learning how to mediate new relationships through writing is challenge enough. To take on a new role, as student questioning the teacher or the institution rather than merely complying with them as through classroom-based assignments, required students to draw on what they knew "worked" as argument from their school experiences, namely, providing evidence for the correctness or accuracy of their factual assertion. But in order to frame the factual aspect of their case as a request for action, whether it be a change of grade, a reconsidered placement, or a second chance at participation in the college

setting, they had to draw on resources well beyond what they could recall being taught about writing in school. Those resources related to the need to view the reader both as a representative of the academic institution, but not as a *grader* or even an *ideological* reader, per se, but as a reader who held the power to make a decision in which the student had a vested interest and over which the student wished to exercise influence.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Influenced by my own college transition biography and widespread news and policy talk contending that American high school students are not prepared for college writing (Butrymowicz, 2017), as I began reading transcripts of students' interviews, I found myself looking for meaning in their stories of struggle to produce texts that met the standards of their new institutions. I panicked early in the process because such stories of desperate under-preparation were not, by and large, what students were sharing with me. To be sure, students told some stories of struggle (notably, Kendra, and to a lesser extent Valorous), but I had to acknowledge that the students in this study were in many ways quite well prepared for college writing, from both institutional and student-centered views, and that this state of preparation was, in fact, noteworthy for its complication to the dominant perception about first-year college writers.

What emerged instead through this counter-narrative were stories of students who, despite being ready for the transition, still had much to learn and who continued to develop in relationship to new expectations and contexts. Woven into and through their stories *were* threads of struggle, but the struggles were not necessarily about meeting new academic requirements or learning new forms. They were more tellingly, and more meaningfully (from the students' points of view), about understanding how writing functioned as part of their efforts to negotiate the social landscape of school: to assert independence or seek help from others, to come across as a "good student" despite not having done what was asked of him or her, to learn if a discipline felt like a place where the writer could feel at home, to communicate about complicated topics with a reader

who was essentially a stranger, to plead one's case to authority for reconsideration in a fraught situation. For the students in this study, then, becoming a college writer involved, to be sure, learning new forms of reading and writing in new academic contexts, but it also involved learning how writing situated them as people within the social fabric of a new institution and a new set of communities.

In this concluding chapter, I will offer a set of implications for theory and practice built from the cases in the preceding chapters before sharing avenues for continued research that the cases and their implications suggest.

Implications for Theory and Practice: Framing the Social as College Preparatory

To begin, it is important to acknowledge that students' high school backgrounds with well-organized, evidence-based argumentative writing served them very well. All students did a significant amount of this kind of writing in college, and they communicated (either explicitly or implicitly) how helpful this preparation was in facilitating their transition to writing in college. Anna called attention to AP English as having been especially good training for her as a writer, and while she acknowledged this is an unlikely possibility, she suggested that everyone going to college should get that same level of preparation. D'Metra, in fact, mentioned that she wished she had had the courage to take AP English when she was in high school because it might have prepared her more thoroughly for the rigors of college. Organizations such as the National Writing Project, it would seem, are doing students a service in focusing so intensely on the textual features and habits of mind associated with text-based argument, as the teaching approaches students in this project experienced in high school were aligned with such efforts.

But this project invites teachers and policy makers to broaden their sense of the kinds of writing that "count" as college preparatory and, as a consequence, to broaden the instructional space for the creation of texts beyond evidence-based academic arguments. Students' experiences offer a convincing case for high school teachers to embrace (or re-embrace) a more social view toward writing, acknowledging that students will not simply be producing more complex texts in new classrooms on different campuses. They will be forging new social relationships with their readers, both within and beyond the classroom walls, and they would be well served by tools and experiences that help them understand and engage in that work.

A key implication seems to be the invitation to expand what it means for a text to be convincing, in terms of who is being convinced, about what, and by necessity, with what rhetorical tools and authorial stances. The dispassionate form of argument that the CCSS (NGACPB/CCSSO, 2010) strongly promote, that students in this study engaged in during both high school and college, and that scholars such as Bomer (2013) criticize for its limits, was not the only kind of important argument in which they engaged. They had to navigate new writing tasks that asked them to position themselves as powerful, exerting agency about their lives in contexts beyond assignments in which a letter grade was the highest stake.

While no student found him or herself helpless in these writing situations, having no sense of approach or strategy to draw from, it is telling that (except for the presentation of factual evidence that they had been taught was the *key* to argumentation), none of the students indicated that they were drawing on rhetorical resources they had learned in English classes or other school writing contexts. High school teachers should

help students consider contexts for persuasive writing beyond academic arguments since students are transitioning not only to new classrooms, but to new institutions and new situations and roles therein.

This project specifically suggests the value in calling students' attention to writing in situations that are contoured by unequal power dynamics and that thus require special intellectual and ethical finesse. Especially since the students in this study who had to engage in these self-advocacy situations (whether in writing or by other means) were primarily students of color, and are therefore already in a sense vulnerable in the "mainstream" university climate (Carter, Locks, & Winkle-Wagner, 2013; Welton & Martinez, 2013), teachers should consider this broader notion of writing instruction not as an optional addition to the "real" academic curriculum, but a key aspect of preparing all students for transition that is, truthfully, only in part academic.

The findings of this project also suggest the usefulness of addressing with students the notion of audience beyond a reader who is interested only in the correctness, clarity, or academic persuasiveness of a text and acknowledging explicitly the human relationships being forged (or not) through writing. Certainly this was not a concern for every writer in this study; Elijah, for example, never mentioned being worried about his teacher-reader's opinion of his writing beyond the grade he received. But the clear message from other students was that it was not always easy or comfortable to write for readers who did not know them well and who likely would not.

Such an adjustment seems impossible to prepare students for in the literal sense because it is unreasonable to ask for high school teachers to develop *less* of a relationship with their students, despite suggestions of the sort from Valorous, D'Metra, and Kendra.

But it does suggest the need for more open conversations in writing classes about the social dynamics of the teacher as reader. Though teachers may assume students consider them as a generalized reader and are therefore not drawing on their personal relationships as a resource for composing, Carter, D'Metra, and Zarina made it clear that in high school they were writing for the particular teacher who had assigned the task. At the very least, it seems an appropriate step to do more to help students gauge how the writer's relationship with the reader determines the degree of explicitness needed by or implicitness allowed within a text. Whether they find the effort to do so worthwhile depends, it would seem from Zarina's case, dependent on the situation.

This project also, I hope, invites college faculty to think more about the relationships they build with students, particularly first-year students, and the role those relationships play in supporting the development of writers. Given the much more limited time they have with their students, it does seem a challenge for post-secondary teachers to build the sorts of "trusting and authentic relationships" Welton and Martinez (2013) found students of color in particular needed in the transition from high school to college (p. 216). If building those relationships is not feasible given institutional constraints, teachers should consider the degree to which certain prompts or tasks ask students to divulge information that they might consider personal or politically sensitive.

For all teachers, these students' stories invite us to reinterpret some writing "problems" not as deficits of skill or effort, but potentially as issues borne out of a mismatch between a writing form, its social milieu, and the writer's own goals and aspirations. Kendra's story in particular points out that a very skilled writer can have difficulty taking on a new form if her heart is not in the production of those texts and her

imagined future does not involve the participation in that form of communication. If a student as strong as Kendra can experience this difficulty, it is not hard to imagine the complications less able students face when writing even more "discipline neutral" academic essays if being a part of the school culture is not of particular interest to them. In other words, when we see a writer who is unduly struggling, we should look at the broader context of the writing situation as a potential site of improvement rather than solely the writer and his or her writing.

More specifically, Kendra's and Zarina's experiences in learning to write lab reports in chemistry, along with D'Metra's perception of strong mismatch between history writing in high school and in college, point to additional work teachers can do across the high school-to-college span to prepare students for writing beyond the essay, beyond English class. Kendra and Zarina both reported having written only a few lab reports in high school. The discrepancy in volume between high school and college not only left them unfamiliar with the form and the ways in which scientific thinking is communicated through it, but it also left them unprepared for having to write them at the quantity and rate expected of them in college. D'Metra's experiences with DBQs, corroborated in some ways by the comments of other students, suggests the need for more critical examination of forms that high school practitioners adopt to support disciplinary writing in their classrooms. Simply because a writing task is specially designed for use in a particular discipline does not necessarily mean it represents the kinds of thinking and communication actually valued in the discipline.

And, last, the students in this study, in particular D'Metra, Kendra, and Zarina reinforce the need to consider the roles race and culture play in the social adjustment to

college in general, and to college writing in particular. While mainstream college readiness research acknowledges diversity as a component of the transition, documents such as the Common Core State Standards (NGACBP/CCSSO, 2010) posit that a student who is "college and career ready" must "come to understand other perspectives and cultures," noting further that "the twenty-first-century classroom and workplace are settings in which people from often widely divergent cultures and who represent diverse experiences and perspectives must learn and work together" (p. 7).

While it does not explicitly state so, the language of this policy document seems framed similarly to Zarina's first-year orientation prompt asking her, as a Muslim woman in America in 2016, to write about what she has "learned about diversity in college," strongly suggesting a dominant white point of view that sees *itself* in need of learning from "others" when contexts become more diverse. Though this is a real and important need, this view toward the college transition is inherently limited to the point of hypocrisy by suggesting the need to appreciate diverse views while actively maintaining white normativity. Despite the general notion that students go away to college to "experience diversity" (Blau, 2006; Guzy, 2011), all but one of the students in this study went to a post-secondary school that was *less* demographically diverse than his or her high school. Better understanding the transition—particularly in light of, say, the notion of becoming independent and the act of asking for help—from the perspectives of students of color, rather than those of majority students, seems an important consideration.

Future Research Implied by This Study

The significant role that racial and cultural match or mismatch played in students' transition stories was an answer to my inquiry, but I see now the need for additional research that takes the nature of this match and the ways in which students of color respond to it as a research question of its own. Particularly as students are invited to imagine themselves and, indeed, *become* participants in disciplinary discourse communities in college, we need greater understanding of how students of color experience literate development in predominantly white institutions and how they can be supported in adding their voices to the conversation when students and faculty are largely white, and students of color describe feeling particularly unwelcome. We need deeper understanding of the phenomenon that students of color experience when they, unlike the white counterparts, move to institutions at which they are more in the minority than they were in high school.

A related line of research would continue to learn from students in their development across four years (and beyond) as college writers. Nearly all of the students in this study were required or elected to take a transition course, a class designed by the institution expressly to help them make the transition to college and find success in their first year. As Valorous put it, her first year of college felt like "starter classes" and D'Metra wondered how long she would be able to "get away with" writing essays in history without deeply engaging in the course readings. In other words, they wondered themselves what would happen when expectations were higher and the support of the transition year was over.

While the field does have longitudinal studies of college writers, additional research designed to get to know students well across several years and in many writing contexts can help deepen theories and understanding of how students develop across the school years. Considering students' literacy practices more broadly, additional study of how students decide what to read and the relationship between reading and writing in the later years of college when students settle in to a major, seems to be a further line of needed inquiry.

Closing Thoughts

Learning from these students and their experiences in their first year of college has helped me realize how limited my understanding of my own college transition had been. I had framed it for years, to myself and others, as a story of a somewhat underprepared student who struggled to produce text that met the standards of the institution. While it was that, I understand now that much more importantly, it was a story of a student struggling to fit in *through* his text, to create a sense of institutional belonging through the quality and qualities of his writing.

Unlike some of the students in this study, however, my struggle was completely private and internal; only the professor and I knew that I was questioning my fitness for participation in the academy. I never felt the burden of anyone else making those assumptions about me based on my race or gender. And although my family was poor, I had entered college at a much more financially stable (and liberal) era, so I had plenty of federal and state financial aid taking the question of affordability off my mind as well. In other words, I had very little institutional information suggesting I might not be a good fit for college, yet a single grade on a single essay made me feel it.

Though secondary teachers already find themselves overwhelmed with the charge to prepare students in the technical sense for college, to ensure they can write a thesis statement and use evidence adeptly to develop and support it, this study has helped me, and I hope, others to appreciate more fully the degree to which the transition to college writing is also about finding ways to fit in, to feel a competent part of an institution that still remains a powerful gateway to personal and professional success. It is understandable why such a view does not appear in a standards document (and it in fact seems concerning to imagine one doing so). But this lack of guidance from a policy perspective puts the responsibility on high school teachers, college faculty, and students to continue learning from one another and acknowledging—even privileging—the social function of writing and its role in making students feel welcome or rejected.

Then, perhaps, we can address more directly another crucial facet of the work that the former Secretary of Education's opening question implies: How can every *college* become ready to welcome students and whose cultural backgrounds and learning experiences may not align with the profile of those who have traditionally taken the path to a "good college"? If an academic system is going to assess second graders for their readiness for college, those children should be able to look the responsible adults back in the eye and receive assurance that colleges are ready for them as well.

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APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

For all interviews at which writing may be present, the participant will be encouraged to provide examples from the writing that I will tag for future reference.

Initial Interview with Students—Sample Questions

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?
2. Why do you want to go to college?
3. Think about your experiences as a writer in high school. How do you think things may be similar or different in college?
4. What do you feel you are ready for as a student and writer? What do you feel less prepared for?
5. How would you describe your typical writing process?
6. Now think about the last paper you wrote for school. What was required of you? How did you go about accomplishing it?
7. What makes a piece of writing good?
8. What are some things that teachers have done to help you improve as a writer?
9. How would you compare yourself as a writer to who you were when you started high school? What do you think accounts for those differences?
10. What's a writing assignment that you feel stretched or challenged you as a writer?
11. What kinds of writing do you do outside of school? How is it similar or different from what's asked of you in school?
12. Why do you think it's important to write in school?
13. What are the most important lessons you have learned about writing? How did you learn them?

Think-aloud protocol (used both times with different prompting texts)

[Brief argumentative text about a social issue—Students will read before responding]

Write the first draft of a brief, well-organized critique of the arguments and information this text.

While you're reading, planning, and writing, tell me what you are thinking.

Clarifying probe: How did you decide to do that {Practice of interest}?

Family member life history interview –Sample Questions

1. How would you describe your students' overall experience in school?
2. What challenges has X faced going through school, and how has he or she responded to those challenges?
3. What special talents has X developed over the years?
4. Why do you think X is going to college?
5. What kinds of reading and writing did X do growing up?
6. What hopes and concerns do you have for X's college experience?
7. What kinds of reading and writing have people done around X growing up?

Student Follow up Interview 1 and 2–Sample Questions

1. Tell me about the writing you did this semester…
2. What have you learned about yourself as a student and a writer your first semester in college?
3. What's been easy about this semester? What's been more difficult?
4. Talk to me about your writing records. What was expected of you this semester, and how did you accomplish it?
5. What has been helpful to you in adjusting to life and learning at college?
6. How has learning in college been different from high school? How has it met your expectation or surprised you?
7. What are some examples of helpful feedback you've gotten about your writing this semester? Why do you consider it helpful?
8. What are some examples of unhelpful feedback you've gotten about your writing this semester? Why do you consider it unhelpful?
9. What about your writing this semester are you most proud of?
10. What do you feel you still need to work on?
11. How has your writing process changed? What do you think accounts for those changes?

Focus Group—Sample Questions

1. Was writing in your first year of college what you expected?
2. What did you learn through writing in college?
3. What is different about writing in college as compared to writing in high school?
4. What was most challenging about writing in college?
5. What advice would you give to students who are still in school or who are preparing to go to college?
6. What advice would you give to teachers who are working to prepare students for writing in college?

Interview of Current or Recent Teachers

What do you want students to know and be able to do as writers?

What are some writing assignments that students do in your class?

What instructional methods have you found most effective in helping students improve as writers

Writing Project Record/Log

Briefly describe the writing assignment here:		
Record date/time/location of work you did on the writing assignment here. Include any other relevant details.	What did you do? What were you working on?	Record any notes or reflections here

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE STUDENT WRITING CATALOG WITH DESCRIPTIVE CODING

D'Metra: Spring Senior Year 25 pieces 49 pages av ~2

Task and Class	Length (DS)	Genre/Type/ Purpose	Collab/ Indep	Prompt/ Un	Structure Provided?	Part of larger project	Sources/No
Who am I Engl 406	1	poem	Indep	yes	yes	no	no
30 Day Challenge	1.5	reflective essay narrative non thesis based	Indep	yes	no	no	no
Self reflection	1.5	reflective essay expository non thesis based	Indep	yes	no?	no	no
What it Takes to be in Love/ Personal Soundtrack--select songs with personal meaning	4.5	essay, non thesis based-thematic tie lightly analytical	Indep	yes	no?	no	no
Soundtrack partner analyst	1.5	thesis based analysis of songs	Indep	yes	no	no	no
Like a girl--critical media analysis	1.5	analytical essay thesis based	Indep	yes	no	no	no

Sofia the first--critical media analysis	1.5	analytical essay thesis based	Indep	yes	no	no	no
The Curtain Rods	2.5	autobiographical essay expository non thesis	Indep		no	no	no
Why I Love God but Hate religion	3.5	definition essay, thesis based	Indep	yes	no	no	no does include two sources
Bucket list	3	paragraph explanation of goals	indep	yes	N/A	no	no
Movie response to Hotel Rwanda	2	thesis based light analysis	indep	yes	no	no	no
Working in school	1.5	Reflective essay	indep	yes	no	no	no
Flaws don't matter	1	Review/lightly analytical	indep	yes	no	no	no
Of Limits and responsibility	1.5	reflective essay argumentative	indep	yes	no	no	no
Celebrating Differences	2	reflective essay, expository	indep	yes	no	no	no
Don't Touch	4.5	argumentative essay	indep	no	no	no	yes
Annotated WC	2.5					yes	
Prologue	2	reflective essay/expository	indep	yes	no	no	no

In Times to Com	1	letter; reflection	indep	yes	no	no	no
Resume	1	resume	indep	yes	yes	no	no
The Power of a Smile Movie Response	2	movie review, lightly analytical and reflective	indep	yes	no	no	no
When I First Saw You	1	Expository response to article	indep	yes	no	no	no
Dear Ms. Dietz	2	Letter to influential person	indep	no	no	no	no
Better Lives Begin Now	6 (wrote half)	Grant Proposal/research paper-argumentative non-analytical	collab	yes	no	yes	yes
Cover letter	1	Cover letter--persuasive	indep	yes	no	no	yes

Fall College 28 pieces 52.5 pages 1.9 pages

Task and Class	Length (DS)	Genre/Type/ Purpose	Collab/ Indep	Prompt/ Un	Structure Provided?	Part of larger project	Sources/No
Eng 101 Genre Analysis-article	1	Practice, 5 questions	Indep	P	NA	Yes	No

Genre Analysis--Quiz	2.5	Practice analysis	Indep	P	NA	Yes	No
Experiment 1 Proposal	1.5	Propose project, expository	Indep	P	Semi	Yes	No
Experiment 1 Research notes--source list	1	Explain sources	Indep	P	Y	Y	Y
Exp 1 Genre Analysis	1	Expository essay	I	P	Semi	Y	Y
Exp 1 Genre Production	1	Triolet (poem)	Indep	P	N	Y	N
Exp 1 Journal	5	Narrate/reflect on process	Indep	P	N	Y	N
Exp 2 Research Notes--annotated bib	2	Explain sources	Indep/C	P	Y	Y	Y
Exp 2 Genre Analysis	1	Expository essay	C	P	N	Y	N
Exp 2 Genre Production	1	Flyer	Indep		N	Y	N
Exp 2	N/A	PPT	C	P	Y	Y	N
Exp 2 Journal	5	Narrate/reflect on process	I	P	N	Y	N
Exp 3 Research notes	2	Explain/narrate sources	I	P	N	Y	N

Exp 3 Journal	3	Explain/reflect on process	I	P	Y	Y	N
Exp 3 Genre Analysis	2	Expository essay	I	P	Semi	Y	N
Exp 3 Genre Production	2	Brochure	I	P	N	Y	N
His 100 Plan of Study	2	Expository plan, socialize to university/discipline	I	P	N	N	N
Response to Defense of Liberal Ed	1.5	Answers to 3 prompts about book	I	P	Y	N	N
Response to Black Lives Matter event	2	Expository reflection, socialize to university	I	P	N	N	N
Chapter 2 Reflection	.5	Expository reflection, socialize	I	P	N	N	N
Cover letter (addressed to instructor)	1	Letter requesting employment at UHS summer camp	I	P	Semi	N	N
His 135 Cause of Civil War	4	Analysis comparing 2 sources	I	P	Yes	N	N
Democracy	4	Analysis comparing 2 sources	I	P	Yes	N	N
LinC Festival ISU	1	Expository reflection, socialize to U	I	P	N	N	N

Human Library	1	Expository reflection, socialize to U	I	P	N	N	N
Professor Interview Write-up	2	Expository reflection, socialize to U	I	P	N	N	N
LinC Reflection	1.5	Expository Reflection, socialize to U	I	P	N	N	N
Goals	1	Expository	I	P	N	N	N

Spring College 7 pieces 22.5 pages ~3.2 pages

Task and Class	**Length (DS)**	**Genre/Type/ Purpose**	**Collab/ Indep**	**Prompt/ Un**	**Structure Provided?**	**Part of larger project**	**Sources/No**
SpeechCom CIP Paper (Communication Improvement Profile)	2	Expository Goal Setting Essay	I	P	Y	N	N
Informative speech	3	Informative speech	I	P	Y	N	N
OJ Simpson Trial	12 (3)	Informative	C	P	Y	N	Y
Pay it Forward	4.5	Persuasive speech	I	P	Y	N	Y

Synthesis Paper	2.5	Reflective essay	I	P	N	N	N
Bio Why We Cheat	2	Expository essay summarizing video and applying to course content	I	P	N	N	N
His Culture Wars	5.5	Answers 9 questions to demonstrate understanding of book	I	P	Y	N	N

APPENDIX C

FULL TEXT OF CALVIN'S APPEAL LETTER DRAFT

When I look back on life, I think to myself "What happened?" "Where did it all go wrong?" "What would people say?". Since I was born, i was caught in a crossfire of expectations. My grandmother who believed I could strive in a predominantly white school, And my biological mother who believed I'd be a pro by learning how to hustle on the streets. Black kids at school asking me "Why do you sound white?" white peers saying "You're white on the inside, and black on the outside, like an oreo". I never felt like I was good enough. I found myself constantly pushing to prove myself to each and everyone I met. Proclaiming that despite my life circumstances, despite everything i've been through, I could still conquer and succeed. I felt like a household name, a staple to be placed in a hall of fame someday, because I did it all. Fast forward 1 year after high school. I'm on the brink of homelessness, I have no financial support from any family still living, and i've lost my chance at getting a quality education. The one thing my grandmother wanted for me, and the thing i so desperately wanted for myself. I sit here today wondering "Where did it all go wrong?" I felt like a comet that had fizzled out, a shell of my former self. No longer was I the boy turned early man. Every accolade i'd ever achieved suddenly became a memory, and I was grasping at straws. In my peer groups, i've always been the anchored one, the one who did what was right, and knew the right answer. The role I had placed on myself was a heavy burden, only fueled by the fire of not fulfilling it.

Lately however, i've learned that it's okay to ask for help

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820

December 3, 2014

Mark Allen Dressman
Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
311 Education
1310 S Sixth
MC 708
Champaign, IL 61820

RE: *Understanding the Transition from High School to College for Student Writers*
IRB Protocol Number: 15395

EXPIRATION DATE: December 2, 2017

Dear Dr. Dressman:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled <*Understanding the Transition from High School to College for Student Writers*>. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 15395 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(1).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at the OPRS office, or visit our website at http://www.irb.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Ronald Banks, MS, CIP
Human Subjects Research Coordinator, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

c: Scott Filkins

telephone (217) 333-2670 • fax (217) 333-0405 • email IRB@illinois.edu